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*FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE*

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*For  
Heaven's Sake*

BY HANNAH SMITH



*An Atlantic Monthly Press Book*

Little, Brown and Company · Boston · 1949

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*Published October 1949*

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ATLANTIC-LITTLE, BROWN BOOKS  
ARE PUBLISHED BY  
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS

*Published simultaneously  
in Canada by McClelland and Stewart Limited*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*To Clovis*





I wish to express my gratitude to Helen Hinckley,  
author of *The Mountains Are Mine*, for her generous  
assistance and valuable suggestions during  
the writing of this book.



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*FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE*

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## Chapter One

*“. . . No place is so dear to my childhood . . .”*

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, IT USED TO SEEM to me that my father's church — the True Believer chapel — always stood, theologically if not geographically, just one block north of the Holy Roller tent and across the tracks and on the other side of town from the really nice churches — the plentiful Methodists, the austere Presbyterians, the respectable Baptists and the exquisite, unattainable Episcopalians.

Some kids dream about growing up to be movie stars or band leaders or social registerites — or even President. I wanted to grow up to be an Episcopalian. I'd never been in an Episcopalian church, but I had a vague, splendid dream of myself in a veiled hat and white gloves, carrying a prayer book and sitting in a pew shaped something like a box stall, with my name on the door.

In fierce, high-church silence I resented the loud amens, the hearty, two-step hymns, the trombone offertories that were an integral part of every service at our church. I yearned for Gothic arches instead of revival



tents, an altar lined with tall white candles instead of the bent heads of repentant seekers.

But when Birdie and Willie Kalston held the revival for Father in our new, square stucco church in Coreton, Nebraska, my Episcopalianism hadn't yet developed. I was nine, Carter was seven and Jonnie was five. Every night we sat in the front row, our high-laced shoes sticking out in a centipede line just below the pulpit.

Being a True Believer was a wonderful thing, and our church was a wonderful place. All the people we knew were in the little auditorium, the Paleys and the Tripps and the Nestles and all the others. Old Brother Kronk, the janitor, kept tiptoeing up and down the aisles in his squeaky shoes opening and shutting windows. Mother sat just across the aisle from us, her wavy dark hair soft and shiny, her brown eyes sometimes watching us, sometimes proud and loving on Father. Grandma sat beside her, white-haired and straight in her rustly black taffeta. Grandma hadn't wanted Father to be a True Believer at all, but now she was one herself — such a good one that people were always asking her if she was a charter member of the church.

And up on the platform, sitting right under the center of the freshly painted sign, "Holiness Becometh Thine House, O Lord, Forever" was Father, his crisp, curly dark hair and black suit making him the most handsome man in church, I thought proudly.

Sunday School was interesting and regular church

was fine, I reflected, but revivals were the best of all. Father driving around town in the Ford while Brother Willie shouted through a megaphone, announcing the special services — Willie and Birdie staying right in our own house — all the people coming to church every night — there was nothing quite so exciting as revival time!

We three little Merriams thought Birdie and Willie were the best evangelists Father had ever called for a revival meeting, for they sang as well as preached, and their songs had real meaning for us — not like the regular Sunday hymns which were full of strange, cryptic expressions.

Accompanied by Birdie's slapdash chords on her mandolin, the big, hearty, red-faced couple sang:

Life is like a mountain railroad  
With an engineer that's brave;  
You must make the trip successful  
From the cradle to the grave!

Birdie, as she sang, put down her mandolin to make dramatic gestures illustrating the turns in the track and the engineer's hand-shielded gaze ahead.

One night the Kalstons sang the Telephone Song:

Central's never "busy"! Always on the line;  
You may hear from heaven almost any time!

Sometimes they marched up and down the platform, arm in arm, singing:

If you bring the one next to you,  
And I'll bring the one next to me,  
In no time at ALL  
We'll have them ALL  
So win them, win them  
One — by — one!

When the Kalstons left, Carter and Jonnie and I felt dejected and forlorn. It seemed no time at all since they came, and here they were shouting good-by from the Pullman vestibule and telling Father they were going to find him a good church in a warmer climate. They'd worried, with Mother, over Father's hacking, tired cough. Sunshine was what Chris Merriam needed, they said.

"Heavenly sunshine! Heavenly sunshine!" Birdie sang, waving and beaming warmly as the train pulled out.

"I don't vant vem to veave," Jonnie said, clinging to Father's hand, his round black eyes mournful.

"We'll meet them in Heaven," Father assured us, and I thought, walking back up the street to our narrow, yellow frame house, what a wonderful place Heaven would be. Everyone we'd ever known would be there — except some of our relatives, of course, who were Sinners. But there would be all the people back at Pardue Bible College in Illinois, where Father had gone to college and I'd started the first grade. There would be all the good, loving Christian people here in Coreton. And there would be all the people we saw at camp meeting every

year and the evangelists who came to hold revivals for Father, and the missionaries who were somewhere called the Foreign Field. Heaven had gold streets and golden houses and the air was full of music. I hoped wistfully that the Kalstons would have the mandolin along when they got to Heaven.

But we heard from Willie and Birdie sooner than we expected. It was about a month later when Willie's letter arrived, describing a wonderful opportunity open at Blanchfield, Arizona.

It's a little burg about 10,000 pop., just the right size [Willie wrote]. Right in the middle of the Salt River Valley, which is the Garden of Eden. Eight crops of alfalfa a year. Nice class of folks, good givers. We got a generous offering and though they don't say what they will pay, I'm sure they will do better by you than what you're getting at Coreton, and you can give all your time to the Lord's Work.

When Father finished reading the letter, he looked up at Mother with one eyebrow cocked and an eager-looking grin on his mouth. I knew, somehow, that we were going to go to Arizona, even though he began to discuss it as if nothing had been decided at all.

"I'd hate to leave Coreton," Mother said, her eyes getting round and black the same way Jonnie's always did when he was excited. "I guess I never dreamed we'd go so far from the relatives when we moved on."

Mother and Father had been born and brought up in Coreton, and all our relatives lived near by. Even though

none of them approved of Father's being a True Believer preacher, they were still relatives.

"After all, Mary," Father said firmly, "there won't be a fuss in the families over this like there was when I went away to Bible college. The relatives are pretty used to the idea of my preaching now."

I was too young to remember the family row that had risen when Father and Mother were converted and Father announced to the relatives that he had the Call and was going away to college to prepare to be a True Believer preacher. But I'd heard Mother and Father tell about it so often that I knew the whole story by heart.

When word got around Coreton that Chris Merriam had got religion and was joining up with those Amcn-hollering True Believers, the family tree quivered root and branch. No one else in the family had ever *got* religion that anyone could remember. If you were born a Webster or a Williams or a Merriam you were automatically a Baptist or a Lutheran or a Presbyterian — and you were therefore automatically a Christian, too.

A *Merriam* not a *Christian*! Ridiculous! The boy was losing his mind.

A steady procession of buggies, surreys and smoke-belching Fords began to flow from Coreton out to the farm where Father and Mother were living. Grandma and Grandpa Merriam headed the cavalcade. Grandma wept. Grandpa raved, breaking into his native Pennsylvania Dutch in his extremity. Father had Pennsylvania Dutch

in him, too, as well as religion. He didn't waver.

"I can't get over it," Grandma wailed, rocking desperately back and forth, her blue eyes streaming. "You've always been such a *good* boy, Chris, until now."

Grandma was right. It always seemed to me that Father must have been *born* good. Other True Believer preachers used to enliven their sermons with lurid tales about their past sins, but Father was handicapped. His "Before" and "After" pictures lacked woefully in depth and drama. He'd never done any really fancy sinning at all. He admitted to smoking a couple of times and he may even have sworn occasionally when the farm mules were unusually mulish, but his most outstanding crime, as far as I was ever able to determine, was the time he stole a Bible from his Uncle Leavey's drug store and presented it to his Sunday School teacher.

Father was born good, born old, born reliable.

That was what his three Awnts pointed out when they drove out to the farm in their shiny black electric. Father had a good many *aunts*, bustling, red-cheeked, practical farm women. Grandpa Merriam's three sisters were the Awnts. They were patrician, wealthy and Presbyterian. They lived in three big white houses in town. Father had always been their favorite nephew. Straight-backed and elegant in their fur-trimmed capes and bead-trimmed flounces, they pointed their duplicate, high-arched little noses at Father and put him through a searching catechism.

"But Christopher," Aunt Perse (short for Persephone) pointed out acidly, "I'm sure you *must* have had religion before. All the Merriams — " Her tone suggested that he must have carelessly mislaid his faith somewhere.

Father shook his head. His old childhood shyness seemed to vanish. The eloquence that was to become second nature rang in his voice. "Not the *heartfelt* kind. I wasn't *changed*!"

Aunt Oshie (short for Oceanica) tittered sharply. "Well, you're *changed* now, sure enough!" she said, with bitterness. "I hope you're satisfied!"

"Yes, I am," said Father, and his eyes glowed. "I'm satisfied!"

Aunt Willie (short for Wilhelmina) wept softly into a lace-edged handkerchief. She kissed my mother sorrowfully. "Oh, you poor, poor thing," she sobbed, and led the rustling violet-scented procession back to the electric.

As a final resort the relatives sent the portly, balding family pastor to call. Dr. Hilton was a practical man. He pointed out brutally that Father would starve to death as a True Believer preacher. And starving alongside him, said Dr. Hilton succinctly, would be Father's loving young wife and two innocent children. No man in his right mind —

It was the wrong approach. Father was the material from which martyrs are made. Just looking at Chris Merriam you could easily picture him tied to a stake, his curly dark hair blowing wirily in the breeze, his gray eyes

fixed confidently on Heaven while the flames licked tentatively at his lean frame. Starving would never deter Father.

Father pinioned the worldly-wise Dr. Hilton with a stern, condemning eye. "Better to starve with God than feast with the Devil," he said briefly. As for his wife and children, he'd always work hard to support them. And he was sure God would look after His children. But in any case, it was his own *first* duty to take his family to Heaven with him. The route to Heaven lay plainly before him, and the first stop on the road was Pardue Bible College over in Illinois. It was God's will.

During the four years we spent in Pardue, Father must have at times uneasily remembered Dr. Hilton's dour prophecy, for although we didn't starve we ate oatmeal so continually that the whole family became allergic to the very sight of a round cereal carton.

Father refused to ask Grandpa Merriam for help, and if he had it would not have been forthcoming. Nothing would have suited Grandpa and Grandma Merriam better than for Chris to see the error of his ways and come back home to Coreton, broke but Baptist again.

Only for one six weeks' period, the winter of his junior year, that bitter cold winter when my brother Jonathan was born, did Father drop out of school to work in the mines down at Georgetown. Sustained by faith and oatmeal, Father was determined to finish college.

While Father was finishing school, I was beginning.



To protect youthful True Believers from the error and folly of public school education, Pardue Bible College conducted its own grammar school and high school. The primary room, taught by a motherly spinster named Miss Moyle, held four grades. I was the entire first grade. Mother had taught me to read before I entered, which was fortunate, since Miss Moyle spent most of her time trying to keep the third grade, Matthew and Mark Gould, from crawling out the windows to join the sinful public school children down the street.

My chief memory of my year at Pardue Bible College is of my battle with the awesome flush toilets in the rest room. The toilets, enormous to my five-year-old eyes, had an extremely frightening characteristic. When the occupant arose, the seat of the toilet flipped suddenly and dangerously into the air. I was always sure that I wouldn't get off in time and that I'd be thrown backwards to disappear into the mysteriously gurgling depths of the plumbing below. This obsession proved to be my undoing on several occasions and led to a certain amount of unpopularity with the Goulds, who were given mop-up duty.

When news of my plight reached Father's ears, he was shocked. Ignoring the LADIES sign on the rest room door and the horrified faces of three little girls inside, he marched me, howling loudly, up to the frightening fixture. I mounted and dismounted at least six times before Father was satisfied.

Thus, I too gained a certain amount of education while Father earned his degree.

The week of his graduation Father got a letter from Coreton. A small True Believer church had just been organized there, and although there were fifteen members worshiping in a rented store building, there was no minister. They could only pay eighteen dollars a week, but they hoped very much that Brother Chris Merriam would come back home to Coreton to shepherd them. Even in 1921, eighteen dollars wasn't enough to support a family of five, and Father knew he'd have to work part time to make a living, but he didn't hesitate in accepting.

Even Grandma Merriam begged him to come. Grandpa Merriam had died during Father's senior year, and Grandma had softened toward Father's calling. She found us a house two doors from hers and began to plan suggestions on improving Mother's child care, house-keeping and cooking.

The relatives were magnanimous. They decided to forgive Father. He'd been gone four years, and their first shock had dimmed a little with time. The Awnts planned a reception for Chris in the city park. They donated two freezers of strawberry ice cream and spread the rough park tables with their best linen damask. A big crowd of Websters and Williams and Merriams gathered at the park for the reception. More than fifty, Grandma said afterwards, angrily weeping.

Father had been pleased about the picnic. He was glad

that the relatives had forgiven him. It was nice to be back home. But he hadn't been present. The relatives swallowed fried chicken, strawberry ice cream and welcome-home-Chris speeches in gloomy silence — without the guest of honor.

For the Awnts, good Presbyterians that they were, had been a little careless in choosing the night for the affair. They chose Wednesday. Father, that evening, led True Believer prayer meeting in the rented store building down at Fifth and Grand.

But now, three years later, I knew that the relatives had almost forgotten the evening in the park. They still thought it was a crime and a shame that Chris had to work in the nursery two days a week to supplement his salary as a True Believer preacher, but they had to admit he'd done pretty well in his first pastorate.

The membership had grown to forty-five, and the congregation now had its own new stucco chapel to worship in. Father had done a good deal of the carpentry work on it himself.

I could see why Mother hated to leave Coreton. Arizona was a long way off. As Mother packed the dishes in the kitchen she whistled softly, under her breath, "Home, home sweet home." But Father, nailing book boxes shut in the front room, sang loudly:

Yes, I feel like traveling on,  
I feel like traveling on;  
My heavenly home is bright and fair,  
I feel like traveling on.

Listening to Father, I was ready to travel on, too. After all, wasn't the Blanchfield church full of wonderful people, just like those at Coreton? More True Believers, traveling to Heaven together.

At the first sight of the Salt River Valley, Father, his country upbringing coming to the fore, was enthusiastic over the emerald fields. The endless miles of sand and sagebrush and low red mesa had given away abruptly to the vivid green of alfalfa, crisscrossed regularly by brimming irrigation ditches.

"Willie was right!" he told Mother, who was mopping faces, brushing hair and straightening blouse collars all around. "Garden of Eden! It looks it!"

"It's — pretty hot," Mother said, but the faint note of panic in her voice was probably due to her natural shyness at meeting strangers. She turned to peer out the window as the train slowed for the stop and the conductor yelled "Blanchfield" from the vestibule.

"Chris," she said, in a low, unbelieving voice. "This can't be the place! Why, it's *tiny*!"

Father looked at the few scattered blocks of houses beyond the station. "This may be just the outskirts," he said doubtfully. "Willie said '10,000 population.' Anyway, look! We're expected."

Conveniently, it was always easy to spot fellow True Believers. The little group on the platform, looking expectantly up at the chair car windows, was unmistakably part of our own colony of Heaven. In spite of the simmering heat, the three middle-aged women wore their

dresses modestly to their wrists, collarbones and ankles; their hair was long, heavy and plainly coiffed. One of the two men below us was thin, bent, and smiling, and though he wore a seersucker summer suit, his tie was soberly black. His companion, a big, cherub-faced younger man, who was fanning himself sluggishly with a farmer-style straw hat, had let temperature triumph over principle — his shirt was open at the neck and his tie dangled from his coat pocket.

We followed close at Father's heel down the train steps and hung back bashfully while the handclasps and introductions and God-bless-yous were going on. The bent smiling man was Brother Ray; the big man was Brother Hessian. I couldn't remember the names of two of the women, but the tall, thin, cool-looking woman with gray braids around her head was Sister Ray.

In a stupor from the strangeness and train-tiredness, we got into one of the two cars in the parking lot and rode through town. It didn't take long. There was only one main business block, around a square, with a handful of residential streets spraying out desultorily from it. There were a good many Mexicans on the street and even one Indian, sitting on the sidewalk in front of the Pay n' Takit.

"There's the church," Brother Hessian said, waving a hand in the direction of a squat white frame building fringed with low, umbrellalike trees.

Father, I could tell, would like to stop. He craned his

neck wistfully back toward the church, as we drove on down the dusty street toward the parsonage, where a dozen cars, a pickup truck and a light wagon were ranged along the curbing. Loud singing and clapping came toward us from the open windows of the little bungalow.

Give me oil in my lamp,  
Oil in my lamp,  
Oil in my lamp, I pray —

We went up the walk and Brother Hessian opened the door. The singing stopped and the roomful of people sat staring in silence at us. The quiet, full of eyes and breathing, seemed to stretch and stretch. Finally Father broke it. "Well," he said dryly, "we're here."

Everyone began to laugh and talk and move around and the bad moment was over. In the dining room the table was covered with platters of chicken, bowls of coleslaw and potato salad. Someone put a loaded plate into my hands and I sat on a wooden folding chair and began to stab blindly and aimlessly at the food with my fork.

The voices in the room were foreign and odd. "Jess is going to carry me to Phoenix Wednesday," a big woman was saying, and I had a dizzying picture of a man plodding down a cement highway with an enormous female slung on his back.

People were talking about the Heat, as if it were a local invention of which they were very proud.

"Goes up to a hundred and eighteen every summer of the world."

"Had to sleep wrapped up in wet sheets three nights last July."

"Coming from the East, you won't be able to stand it."

It was hot now. My dress stuck damply to my back and there was a pebble of station-lot gravel in one of my shoes but I was too bashful to shake it out. A tear ran down my nose and onto the plate. I felt as if I'd been sitting there under the battery of eyes for hours.

And the next morning, even though the people were gone, the strangeness stayed on. After breakfast we all stood on the front porch and looked around town. We were at the end of the street and across from us, just beyond the irrigation ditch, lay the brown stubble of a field. Although it was only nine in the morning, the air seemed to shimmer with dust and sun and the glare from the front sidewalk was a bright spear in our eyes.

Heavy silence curtained the porch.

"Well," said Father stoutly, after a little while, "Willie was right about one thing. At least this heat will be good for my cough."

"That's right, I guess," said Mother, pushing her dark, heavy hair back from her flushed forehead. She sat down on the edge of the porch and leaned her head against a pillar. We three children sat down beside her, crowding as close as we could get.

"All things work together for good to them that love God," quoted Father in a firm, argumentative tone.

Mother said nothing.

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content," Father quoted.

"I don't believe Saint Paul was ever in Arizona," Mother observed politely.

A skeleton of a horse pulling the skeleton of a wagon came rattling by. A foreign-looking blond giant with his shirttail outside his pants was standing up in the swaying, rickety cart, lashing the shambling old nag with a long whip.

"Russian colony south of town, Brother Hessian said." Father's voice held a bright, informative note.

Mother sniffed.

"Willie Kalston," Father said diffidently, "was certainly — enthusiastic."

"I can think of a better word," said Mother, choking a little on the clouds of yellow dust rolling up in the wagon's wake. "Those Kalstons!"

"Sh!" said Father, buttoning his coat. "Here comes Brother Ray."

The thin, smiling man got slowly out of his car and came limping up the walk. He took off his hat, revealing his thinning hair, and sat down on the edge of the porch between Carter and me.

"Don't let me forget I got some eggs for you in the car or Maisie will skin me."

Absently he took out three sticks of chewing gum and handed them down the line on the porch. "Did you know that Maisie isn't my wife?" he asked conversationally,



with a sober little twinkle in his eye as he looked at Mother.

Mother's mouth fell open a little. *Arizona was really too — !*

"No," said Brother Ray solemnly, "she's my sister. Being a True Believer is a real advantage for her, I always say. Everybody calls her *Sister* instead of *Miss*, so no one knows she's a maiden lady."

Mother laughed a little and made room on the porch edge for Father to sit down. Brother Ray sighed and pulled a red top from his pocket; he spun it on the boards near Jonnie. "I got no use for that thing," he said disparagingly. "You might as well take it off my hands."

He looked at Mother. "Maisie and I came out here ten years ago to die," he said. He tapped his chest significantly. "We kept waiting and old Poole down at the mortuary kept waiting but we're still right here, feeling better every day. Last I heard, Poole isn't feeling so good, though."

"Don't you ever — want to go home?" Mother asked in a small voice, her eyes on her hands.

The wrinkles around Brother Ray's tired, kind eyes deepened as he smiled across Carter's head at her. "We surely did at first. Maisie kept saying she'd rather go home and die of consumption in Iowa than die of homesickness in Arizona. But now we like it fine. Just fine. It's home now. We've got some fine people in this church,

even though it's small. And Maisie and I both enjoy the scenery — the country — so much."

Father and Mother looked at him incredulously and then down the dusty street.

Brother Ray gave his deep, grudging chuckle. "Takes a while," he said. "I guess scenery means water and green trees to you now. But you get to like it — Camelback Mountain and the cactus and the distances. You'd like the pine country up around Prescott, too. Good many of the members go up there for a part of the summer every year. You better, too, at least this first year."

"Well," said Father, speculatively, "I suppose I could hold revival services up there, couldn't I?"

Something had changed there on the porch. All at once, as if released by a common spring, the three of us youngsters bounced up and started around the house on an exploratory trip. As I climbed up into the peach tree beside the back porch, I had a secure, comfortable, lovely feeling again. Everywhere we went, we found God's people. It was still like Heaven, being a True Believer — even in Arizona!

## Chapter Two

*"I'm a pilgrim, and I'm a stranger . . ."*

IT WAS THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL AT BLANCHFIELD.

Even though the temperature in the flat-roofed, square box housing the fifth grade stood at its usual scorching September high, even though the sun blazed like a torch through the windows beside me, my sacrilegious thought was sending cold shivers up my spine.

*I had sinned.*

*I was thinking blasphemy.*

*I didn't want to be a True Believer.*

Staring at the open pages of my new geography book, I put a frightened mental finger on this staggering new idea. I was heartily glad that Father was clear across town, doing the Monday morning janitor work at the church.

Listening to Father, I'd always been sure I knew just what God was like.

God had light gray, searching eyes, a crest of curly dark hair, high cheekbones, a long, straight nose and a prominent, stubborn jaw line. God was quite thin and His

shoulders stooped just a trifle under the weight of His work. He was always dressed carefully in dark, sober clothes. God was extremely serious; He never smiled much, but sometimes a little grin twitched one corner of His mouth when humanity amused Him. God was just and stern and all-seeing, and to please Him one must be a wholehearted, ardent True Believer.

God, in fact, was just about like Father.

Yet here I was, sitting in the sixth row of the fifth grade at Blanchfield Grammar School, letting my wicked, traitorous thoughts fly up in the face of Divinity. Since God knew my inmost thoughts and since Father was always in such close touch with God, I felt that Father must surely, even now, know what I was thinking.

If we could only have stayed in Nebraska, I thought, in a pleading apology to God, I'd never have felt this way — ever. Nothing in the past had prepared me for the shock of Blanchfield grammar school.

True, Carter and Jonnie and I had disliked the school on sight that morning. The three of us, in our dark, Nebraska Sunday clothes, stood on the edge of the school grounds and looked in amazement at the buildings.

"Doesn't look like a *school*," Carter said doubtfully, taking a firmer grip on Jonnie's fat little hand.

With sinking heart, I agreed. A school shouldn't look like a set of tan building blocks laid out in rows in a sandbox, I thought with disapproval. The rows and rows

of square tan stucco cubes were the ugliest things I'd ever seen. A school should be like the one back in Coreton — the three-story Longfellow School, with ivy bearding its red brick face and with big paper sunflowers shining from the first floor windows.

A school, I told myself, should at least have a little grass around it — a few more trees. The only grass at the Blanchfield school was a small, jaded patch just in front of the auditorium. In the middle of the plot leaned a tired sign saying KEEP OFF. There was one row of chinaberry trees down at the far end of the playgrounds, but their trunks were knee-deep in sand and pop-bottle caps and old lunch sacks.

A teacher directed us to our separate cubicles. I was a little late and the class had already begun. Unbearably conscious of the unanimous gaze in my direction, I stood beside the teacher's desk and answered her questions in a muffled voice as she filled in a registration card for me.

"Your name?"

A boy in the second row made a gargoye grimace at me and I looked at him in mystified surprise.

"Your name? Your name!"

"Hannah Merriam."

"Address?"

"609 Madera Street."

"Father's occupation?"

"He's the pastor at the True Believer church."

There was a snicker somewhere and a hoarse voice back in the corner said, "Hallee-lujah!"

The red in my face was still so painful a half hour later it made my eyes sting. The low ripple of laughter still rung in my ears. I kept my eyes on my book and heard that "Hallee-lujah" over and over again, a huge, distorted echo in the back of my mind. I looked with painful recognition at the church service the day before. I remembered Sister Goad's waving handkerchief, her tearful promenade up and down the aisle during the song service. I remembered Brother 'Chanson's loud prayer, how he had hammered his chair in rhythmic emphasis as he prayed. "Hallee-lujah!" said the whisper again and again. "Hallee-lujah!"

When the recess bell rang, I followed the pell-mell rush to the playground and stood blinking in the white, dusty glare, watching the impromptu, furious game of kick-the-can that swirled in a screaming, shouting melee up and down the wide, bare dirt desert that surrounded the school buildings. I was engrossed in absorbing all the strangeness — the fact that some of the shouted words from the milling players were in Spanish, the fact that there wasn't a teacher in sight to supervise or referee — and oddest of all, that half the players in the fierce, swift game were girls.

I didn't notice that three girls had come up to stand beside me until I jumped, as one of them, a round, tow-headed girl who looked as if she'd been stuffed into her

shiny pink skin, took hold of my skirt and pulled it aside to look at my stockings.

"What you wearing those for?" she asked. "Nobody else has got on stockings."

The other two girls giggled helplessly. "Effie!" one of them said, half-shocked, half-admiring.

I turned white and then red, looking at their bare brown legs. I tried to smile and then I tried to pull away, but Effie, emboldened by my obvious terror, held on and jerked my dress a little higher.

"She's got on long garters, too," she informed her friends. "Look!"

"Don't!" I quavered, in a frightened, panicky squeak, trying futilely to push my skirt down. "Don't!"

Several other girls hurried over. I tried to back away but Effie, laughing delightedly, held on to the hem of my skirt.

"Look at the stockings, stockings, stockings!" she chanted.

All at once, unaccountably and ridiculously, I pulled away and sat flat down in the dirt. I pulled my skirt down over my shoes and long black stockings. There was a scream of glee from the group of girls. The shout even broke up the kick-the-can game. Boys and girls came running from every direction. I was suddenly the center of a jostling, shouting, questioning ring. Cravenly, I put my face down on my knees.

"What's the matter with her?"

"¿Que pasa?"

"Who is it?"

"It's the new girl."

"The True Believer girl? What's the matter with her?"

"Effie asked her why she had on stockings."

"Is that all?"

"What's she sitting down for?"

All at once, I stood up and broke blindly through the circle. I heard the bell for the end of recess just as I reached the far end of the playground, but I kept on going. I ran all eight blocks home and burst into the parsonage in such a torrent of gibbering hysteria that Mother was frightened white. She pushed me into a chair and ran to get a glass of water and a wet washcloth.

Wild-haired, dust-smeared and red-eyed, I screamed after her. "Why couldn't Father have been some other kind of preacher? Why did he have to be a True Believer?"

If Father weren't a True Believer preacher, I was sure I wouldn't be wearing long black stockings and black shoes while everyone else went stylishly barefoot.

Mother didn't answer me. She washed my face and brushed my hair and assured me I didn't need to go back to school for the rest of the day.

"I'm never going back there. Never! Never!"

"You'll feel better by tomorrow." She took the glass of water back to the kitchen and turned in the doorway to give me a dark-eyed, level look. "And as for your father



being any other kind of preacher, he never would. I know this is hard for you now, but I know in time you'll be proud and thankful to be a True Believer. If it hadn't been for the True Believer Church, your father and I never would have been converted."

If only, I thought bitterly, Father could have been converted into some more respectable denomination!

I couldn't remember Father's conversion — I'd only been two years old at the time — but up till now I'd always enjoyed the story. Father's voice, when he told about it, was always hoarse with feeling, his eyes warm with the memory.

He and Mother had been married four years and had two children, Carter and me, when Brother Trehan, a True Believer evangelist, held a revival meeting in the Gredge Valley schoolhouse, back in Nebraska.

Grandpa and Grandma Merriam had moved into Coreton and turned the family farm over to Father. He liked farming; he was a hard worker and was doing well. He didn't take much time out for relaxation, however; it was quite a drive into town, and though he'd had a good Baptist upbringing, some Sundays he and Mother wouldn't drive into Coreton to church at all.

When the evangelist came to the schoolhouse, however, most of the people around Gredge Valley, including Mother and Father, went to the meetings. It was close home and it gave the neighbors a chance to see each other. The heyday of the big revival meeting was already

pretty well past, even then, and most Gredge Valley farmers probably went to the schoolhouse more from curiosity than anything else.

Brother Trehan wasn't much of a preacher. He was a stooped, nearsighted, pleasant little man and a quiet speaker. After the first night, when the Gredge Valleyites saw that he didn't pound the pulpit, show lantern slides or tell deathbed stories, most of them quit coming.

Not Father.

Brother Trehan was talking about something Father had never heard before, even though he'd gone to Sunday School regularly all his life and joined the Coreton Baptist Church when he was twelve.

"'Come out from among them and be ye separate,' saith the Lord," quoted Brother Trehan. And, "Be ye therefore *perfect*." *Human perfection?* Father felt, in humble guilt, that he was far from perfect.

He hitched up the horses and went to the schoolhouse every night and sat with his lean, sober young face bent intently and hungrily on the preacher. Finally, on Friday night, while Ivy Tanner pumped wheezingly away at "Just As I Am" on the battered, folding organ, Father went forward and knelt by the front row of desks. Father got religion.

After a minute, Mother followed him. Undoubtedly she had no clear idea that night what she was letting herself in for — the relatives' askance eyes, the pinching financial struggles, the nomad life from one crowded par-

sonage to another — but after a minute Mother went down, past their friends who had come to visit or to scoff — and knelt beside Father. In her own quiet way, Mother got religion, too.

Mother, born Mary Webster, had been brought up a Presbyterian like all the Websters. She was shy, dark, pretty and witty, and she always retained a little core of formal Presbyterianism throughout a lifetime among the informal True Believers.

That night in the schoolhouse it was Father who had the vision — the shining white vision of a pure and stainless heart. A text of Scripture he used frequently was from the prophet Isaiah:

I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple . . . Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.

Isaiah's vision was Father's, too. Holiness of heart and life — that was his unfaltering, fixed goal throughout his life. *A pure and holy heart, a conscience devoid of guilt toward God and man!* It was a high goal for weak, human flesh, but his eyes never wavered from that mark. And since it was a True Believer preacher who had brought him this ineffable vision of purity, of holiness, Father that night cast his lot for life with the little band.

And little band it was. Up till the arrival of Brother Trehan, Father had never so much as heard of the True Believers. His eager questions revealed that there were only about fifty thousand True Believers in the whole country, that they were scattered in little groups here and

there, most of them worshipping in rented store buildings, canvas tents and tiny chapels.

Brother Trehan gave Father one of the True Believer church manuals, that book of rules that was to exercise such stringent influence upon my life. Father read it eagerly. The rules for membership were strict, but abstaining from attendance at worldly amusements, from the use of tobacco and alcohol, eschewing the wearing of gold or costly array — those were trivial trinkets to exchange for the glittering, priceless jewel of holiness.

Perhaps, I thought, perhaps if I'd been there at Gredge Valley, too — perhaps I wouldn't have my secret, mutinous thoughts about the church. Perhaps I wasn't really converted! When I was asked — and I frequently was — if I were a Christian, I always said "Yes." But if I were really a Christian, surely I could be as brave and unflinching and courageous as Father!

Even though, when I went back to school two days later, the teacher made Effie apologize to me, I was marked for good as the Outsider. When I was teased, I cried. When I was threatened, I ran. If I were only like Father, I was sure I could be different.

"Stand up for your principles," Father always said, his jaw firm, his eyes glinting.

I wasn't sure what my principles were, but even if I found out, I was sure I wouldn't be able to defend them!

When the school year ended we joined the northward trek of church members to Prescott to escape the heat. But Father didn't spend the two months in the moun-

tains as a vacation. Although we lived in a tent under the pines outside of town, Father and Brother Ray pitched a big revival tabernacle downtown in Prescott, and Father held evangelistic services every night.

Even though he took time during the day to go with us on hikes, to scramble over the rocks at Granite Dells or climb the ladders to the cliff dwellers' ancient apartments, each night we were back under the familiar canvas roof, hearing the same songs we heard down in Blanchfield and seeing most of the same faces. Only the farmers in the Blanchfield church, who couldn't leave their cotton and alfalfa fields, were missing.

Church under the tent was exciting and pleasant and uplifting again. In Prescott I lost the feeling of watching, hostile eyes. Blanchfield Grammar School was far away, but I remembered it the night I went forward and knelt at the splintery pine plank that was the mourners' bench. Perhaps I'd have Father's courage now! And several days later, I joined the long line of white-clad converts at the outdoor baptismal service. Father always made any kind of ritual shiveringly impressive and even though the baptistry was only a rusty watering tank on a Skull Valley cattle ranch, I felt a solemn sense of exultation as I stood waist deep in the brown water beside Father and heard his ringing words, "Daughter, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Now — surely, surely, I thought, I will be invincible, brave and unafraid. Surely now I will be like Father.

## Chapter Three

*"On Jordan's stormy banks I stand . . ."*

ONE MORNING MR. FITZROY, THE SIXTH GRADE teacher, announced that Miss Cardogan had chosen ten sixth grade girls for the Thanksgiving auditorium program. I was thrilled when my name was called among the ten, and we were excused from arithmetic that day to practice.

When we got down to the auditorium, Miss Cardogan and all the fifth grade girls were already waiting for us on the stage.

"Girls," the teacher called as we trooped down the aisle. "I need you for the Autumn Leaf Dance we're giving. I don't have enough girls in the fifth grade for the number. Choose a partner and get into the circle."

It was delirious fun, weaving in and out in an intricate pattern of steps, while Miss Cardogan circled us, playing "Country Gardens" on a harmonica, interspersing her playing with shouted directions. We were, I learned during a breathing spell, to have brown, gold and red crepe-paper costumes. Even now the eighth grade sewing classes were making them for us.

Miss Cardogan had designed the costumes herself and she described them with poetic enthusiasm. "Nothing but huge overlapping leaves of various colors, girls! Those of you who came from back East will remember how the leaves whirled and fluttered in the autumn. That's the effect I want you to give."

I whirled and fluttered home and whirled and fluttered around the house. I talked Autumn Leaf Dance pretty constantly but no one was paying much attention to any of us three noisy older kids just then. The house was full of visiting women, bringing tissue-wrapped packages and exclaiming over the red, uninteresting-looking little bundle in the pink-lined laundry basket in the front bedroom. Although my sister Elizabeth was always a delight to me later, when she arrived I was far more interested in remembering the lilting "Turn, Turn, Step, Turn, Swing, Swing," of the Autumn Leaf Dance.

Two evenings before the Thanksgiving program, Carter and Jonnie and I were washing dishes in the kitchen while Father sat in the front bedroom talking to Mother as she fed the baby.

I was washing — and talking Autumn Leaf Dance.

Carter was drying — and talking baseball.

Jonnie stood by the cupboard, catching the partially dried dishes as Carter pitched them to him, putting them away and listening adoringly to Carter.

It didn't make any difference to me whether I had an audience or not. I slopped dreamily along, my dress front

wet and the dish water congealing, as I droned in happy soliloquy through the "Turn, Turn, Step, Turn, Swing, Swing," that went with the joyous bounce of "Country Gardens."

All at once I looked up. Father was standing in the kitchen door looking at me. "Did you say *dance*?" he asked unbelievably.

Prophetic dismay seized me. "It's — it's not really a *dance*," I stammered. "It's more of a — a *march*. A march in a circle."

"A dance is a dance," said Father firmly. "The church manual forbids dancing, as you know. There may be no harm in this one, but it can lead to something else — to ballroom dancing. You should have told me about this sooner."

When I mutely held out Father's note to Miss Cardogan the next day at school, she was annoyed. If I dropped out, my partner would have to, too. "Would it do any good if I talked to your father?" she asked. "Didn't you explain that this is really a drill set to music?"

No, said Father, when he saw Miss Cardogan. He'd read the program in the newspaper — *Autumn Leaf Dance* by the fifth and sixth grade girls. A drill was a dance. A circle march was a dance. I could not take part.

I was as baffling and dismaying to Father as he was to me.

"I don't see why you even wanted to be in it," he pro-



tested with exasperation as I sulked mutinously at every meal. And, as usual, he quoted Scripture. "‘Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.’ Can you honestly say that clumping around with a lot of girls in flimsy crepe-paper costumes would be to God’s glory?"

*That’s not the way it was at all*, I brooded, remembering the whirling kaleidoscope of meshing colors on the auditorium stage. And blasphemously I added, "Anyway, I still wish I had!"

Mother was always trying to smooth family relations. Now she called to Father from the bedroom. "Maybe Hannah will feel better if you tell her about the Bensons. Hannah, Leola is coming out to Blanchfield to live!"

Father looked at me with eager pleasure.

"Leola Benson?" I asked incredulously.

He nodded, gratified that he could offer me this solace.

I scowled. "I don’t like her," I said bitterly. "All I can remember about her is that she made me eat those tacks that time in Pardue."

Willard Benson, Leola’s father, had been in school at Pardue Bible College at the same time Father was. The Bensons and Father and Mother grew to be close friends. They seemed to feel, I remembered, that it was a delightful coincidence that they each had a little girl, only a few months apart in age.

I’d never forget the first time I saw Leola. Pushed unwillingly into each other’s company in the living room while our parents sat talking around the kitchen stove,

we squared off and looked each other over with mutual lack of enthusiasm.

All at once Leola smiled enticingly, showing her prominent dimples and lighting up her large, long-lashed eyes. "I can do something you can't do," she observed, swishing her dress tail nonchalantly.

I glowered at her and kicked a chair leg. "No, you can't. You can't even read yet," I said, taking low advantage.

Her smile deepened mysteriously. "I can eat tacks," she said, shrugging off the ability to read as obviously insignificant. While I stared, she produced a large handful of carpet tacks from her apron pocket, and selecting several, popped them into her mouth and gulped histrionically.

"See!" she said thickly, opening her mouth slightly. "All gone!"

There was, of course, only one thing for me to do and I did it. The tacks didn't go down easy. They seemed to stick halfway down my throat and grow rapidly to spike size. I gasped. I choked. I gagged.

When Mother reached me, I was going through convulsions a road-show Camille would have envied. Leola stood watching with wide, innocent eyes. She looked as if she had just happened to be passing at that moment. I pointed indignantly, trying to implicate her, but I was being stuffed with dry bread crusts and couldn't say a word. Not until I got home several hours later was I able

to make my report and since I wasn't present for any punishment Leola got, my sense of grievance was enormous and long lasting. I should have guessed, even then, that Leola was going to grow up to be a successful woman evangelist!

And now Leola was coming to Blanchfield to live, Father was saying.

When we arrived in Arizona, about 1921, the state had only been in the union for a decade, and it still had a fascinatingly primitive character. Although the Salt River Valley around Phoenix had a network of paved highways, once we crossed the big canal onto the desert, the roads were apt to dwindle to mere two-line tracks zigzagging through the sagebrush. The map of the state was an explorer's challenge. "Inquire Locally Before Proceeding," "Dangerous in Wet Weather," "No Water Here," and similar stimulating warnings were sprinkled liberally over the orange face of Arizona on the map.

Although Father's pastoral work kept him in the green Salt River Valley, his eyes strayed pretty frequently across the canal toward the vast, beckoning reaches of sand, sagebrush and purple mountains, as he drove his newly acquired Dodge touring car up and down the valley. Brother Ray's prophecy had come true; Father loved Arizona scenery.

Fortunately, before he developed a mild case of schizophrenia, Father was assigned to the Arizona district superintendency, a job that satisfied his yen for exploring and

still allowed him to carry forward the one driving passion of his lifetime — the conversion of men and women into True Believers.

The job of district superintendent in some states was an honor, but the True Believer district in Arizona was composed of only seven churches, scattered widely about the state, and the superintendency was a thankless task, requiring many miles of driving over the unpredictable desert and mountain roads. This administrative job had been passed quickly from one pastor to another as a part-time assignment. But with Father, it stayed. He loved it! He enjoyed ministering to the anemic little pioneer churches, and he enjoyed even more going into a new town, hiring a hall, putting out handbills, and organizing a True Believer church and Sunday School where none had been before. It was only incidental that he also enormously enjoyed the spectacular Western scenery that he rode through between churches.

He bought auxiliary gas-and-water tanks for the Dodge's high running boards, strapped a stout board and shovel on the back and slapped a new broad-brimmed felt sombrero on his head.

"Praise the Lord!" said Father, and took off to Bisbee at forty miles an hour in a cloud of yellow sand.

Anything Father put his hand to usually did well, and the district grew under his stern, paternal eye. But he found it difficult to keep up his work in Blanchfield as well as he should. Although the church was so small it

really couldn't afford to pay one salary, let alone two, Father decided that what he needed was an assistant pastor — and he knew just the man for the job. Willard Benson had dropped out of Pardue before he'd finished, and most of the time he worked as a carpenter, but he still yearned to preach. Father was sure he'd welcome a chance to work part-time at the Blanchfield church, support himself and his family by doing carpenter work, but be on hand to lead prayer meetings and do some of the pastoral calling.

Mother was thrilled and excited at the idea of having sweet-faced, blue-eyed Sister Benson near. Carter and Jonnie were crazy to see Victor again. I was outvoted. I said nothing. Mother looked at me sharply when the letter arrived from Brother Benson saying he'd like to come to Arizona.

"Now I want you to get along with Leola," she said in a no-nonsense-now tone. "You're both older now. She'll be good company for you in that school."

I gave Mother a pained, injured look and didn't answer. Maybe Leola would be different now, I thought, with faint hope.

When she arrived, I decided that Leola had improved with age. She was prettier than ever and I felt a certain proprietary pride when we started off to school together. She listened with flattering interest while I told her everything I could think of about Blanchfield Grammar School and the sixth grade to which I had now ad-

vanced. Leola would be in the fifth with nice Miss Cardogan, but I told her impressively that my teacher, Mr. Fitzroy, hated Arizona and had once said that we were all "wild and woolly and full of fleas." I told her that the school was more than half Mexican and Russian and that Maria Gonzales in the seventh grade had brought her own baby to school in a shoe box two weeks before. I told her that in Blanchfield the big kids didn't play games at recess at all, as they did "back home."

"They don't?" Leola asked with satisfactory surprise. "What do they do then?"

I paused impressively and lowered my voice for dramatic effect. "Everyone sits on the bank of the irrigation ditch and tells jokes — *dirty* ones!"

At her shocked, incredulous look, I softened. I decided at last, to warn her about stockings. Partly for financial reasons, partly because of the heat, but chiefly because of my pleadings, Mother had allowed me to discard my long black stockings, although she still insisted that I wear sandals to school. As soon as I'd seen Leola's long tan ribbed hose, I'd remembered some old unsettled scores and decided to let her find out about stockings the hard way. But now, completely won over by her disarming friendliness, I gave her a solemn warning.

"Nobody wears stockings to school here," I told her. "They — they laugh at you if you do." I swallowed hard against the excruciating memory, the circle of faces staring down at me.

Leola looked down at my bare, scratched legs and then at her own neat stockings. She pursed her lips, deepening her dimples. "They'd better not laugh at me," she said gently.

I began to suffer in vicarious anticipation. "Why don't you put your socks in your lunch sack," I suggested helpfully. "Then you could put them back on on the way home."

Leola gave me an incredulous, disapproving look. "Why, Hannah!" she said.

We reached the edge of the school ground just as one little third grade boy took out after another little third grade boy with a rock. "Come back here, God damn you!" the rock hurler yelled raucously.

Leola put down her lunch sack. With one swift leap she caught hold of the little boy's arm. She was a small, slight girl, but before he could do more than jerk one startled look in her direction, she had flipped him over and given him a half dozen powerful wallops on the seat of his dusty overalls.

"There!" she said righteously, putting him back on his feet. "Maybe that will teach you not to swear, Little Boy!"

She picked up her lunch sack and walked on, as cool, starched and dainty as ever, her brown-ribbed legs marching steadily toward the stucco block that housed the fifth grade. Following her, I knew with prophetic certainty that no one would torment Leola about her long stockings. At least, not more than once.

In the weeks that followed, I watched Leola's calm progress toward leadership at Blanchfield Grammar School and was filled with self-derogatory despair. Why couldn't I be like her? Leola was as serenely satisfied to be a True Believer as was Father himself. It didn't bother her when someone catcalled "Amen, Hallelujah" after her, and once when Effie made an attempt at taunting her about being a True Believer, Leola pitched into her with such a fury of flailing fists and scratching fingernails that Effie — and everyone else — gave her respectful and awed homage from then on.

Father would call that *standing up for your principles*, I thought in meditative gloom. He'd also told us to turn the other cheek, and that seemed to be the path I was taking, even though it was involuntary. Somehow, I felt, religion seemed to have done a lot more for Leola than it had for me. For one thing, I seemed to have such a variety of irrepressible longings to subdue.

Leola wasn't even interested when Louise Ellis, the acknowledged social leader of the sixth grade, asked me if I'd like to join the Campfire Girls. Louise and her best friend, Rosalie Howell, were my secret and envied idols. They didn't join the ditch-story circle, yet everyone in our grade gave them flattering adulation.

I couldn't believe it.

Would I like to join the Campfire Girls?

Would Mrs. Newrich like to make the Junior League?

"Why, yes, I think so," I said with careless, breathless nonchalance. "I'll ask my mother."



I ran all the way home and tore through every room in the house looking for Mother. I finally found her carrying a basket of diapers to the backyard clothesline when I bore down on her.

"Well, I guess you can join," she said, around a clothespin, adding, as a cautious afterthought, "if it doesn't cost too much."

"Oh, it doesn't! It doesn't! Louise says you have to earn most of the money yourself. Louise says — Louise says —"

I followed Mother around the house every afternoon for a week, talking Campfire Girls. The big event came the next Tuesday afternoon after school. Miss Janssen, the art teacher, was the Campfire Girls' sponsor, and the organization meeting would be held in the art room.

Monday afternoon Mrs. Bella Janes came calling on Father. Mrs. Janes was an authority on the Campfire Girls. Her daughter had once, for a short time, belonged to the organization, she said. She'd just happened to hear that the preacher's daughter was thinking of joining and she'd come to warn Father. Did he know . . . ?

The catastrophe fell at the dinner table.

"Hannah," said Father, his face sober with regret — and apprehension — as he looked across the table at me, "I'm sorry, but I don't want you to join the Campfire Girls. Sister Janes was here this afternoon and she tells me it's a very pagan organization. She says the members go through sun-worshiping rites at their meetings. I don't

think it's anything for a True Believer to belong to."

Wails, pleadings, hysterics — nothing did any good. As unhappy as I was, Father and Mother were still unhappier. Mother made several uneasy little sorties into the bedroom where I lay spread-eagled on the counterpane. Whenever I heard her hesitant footsteps, my sobs increased in velocity so that she was hard put to make herself heard.

"Honey," she said, in a low, hurried voice, "I think maybe I can squeeze enough out of the budget this week to get you those sandals you saw at the Army and Navy store."

I sobbed on, louder and louder.

Father sat on the foot of the bed. He put his hand on my head. I jerked away. Father began to talk about the value of my soul. He weighed it against imponderable immensities of wealth, power, and fame. He talked of the echoing, rolling depths and distances of eternity, of the glorious, shining whiteness of Heaven. What, asked Father, was the Blanchfield Grammar School sixth grade Campfire Girls circle against all that?

What, I asked silently, my face buried in the damp bedspread, was far-off, ethereal eternity, against the delirious thrill of being called Nokomis or Minnehaha and wearing moccasins and a beaded headband?

The Campfire Girls made headbands on cunning little hand looms. They took an overnight camping trip up to Spanish Dam. They went on bird walks and could

recognize a yellow-headed blackbird at fifty paces. They were learning Child Care and got to bathe a real live baby.

I read books.

I read *The Campfire Girls at Boarding School*, *The Campfire Girls at Lake Gitche Gumee*, *The Campfire Girls Over the Top*.

And at recess I joined the low-voiced story telling circle on the ditch bank.

## Chapter Four

*"I will seek a place of refuge . . ."*

A FIRE TRUCK WAILED AND SHRIEKED DOWN Main Street. A branch crashed against the porch roof. Thunder growled and rattled overhead. Inside the house, no one was sleeping. The air was unbearably hot and sultry and the lightning was like unearthly artillery fire against the windows.

First Jonnie, then I, and finally Carter felt our hurried way into Father's and Mother's room.

"This bedroom's like an oven," Father said and shepherding us all before him he spread a blanket in the middle of the living room floor. He looked like an Old Testament prophet in his long, striped bathrobe, his curly hair bushy from bed, as he put baby Elizabeth down on the blanket beside Mother. It was a little cooler in the living room. Father had just started to reach for a book so he could read to us, when the lights went off, and Jonnie began to whimper a little in the darkness.

"I'll get a flashlight," Father said calmly, and while we all waited, huddled around Mother in the blackness, we

heard him fumbling around in the kitchen, striking matches. When he came back, he had the light and a book in his hand — *Great Expectations*. While the lightning turned the windows blue-white and the thunder shook the rooftops, Father read to us by the beam of the flashlight. I went to sleep with the comforting image of Father's lean, serious face bent above his book in the flashlight's yellow halo. I felt drowsily safe. God would never let lightning strike Father!

Dropping off to sleep, I remembered a bright-colored picture I'd seen in a good many True Believer homes — a print entitled, "The Rock of Ages." The background of the picture was a wild, stormy sea, slashed by lightning. In the foreground a young woman with long, streaming hair and a white nightgown was clinging to an immense, cross-shaped rock. Home was like that, I thought, my mind dim with sleep. It was warm and safe and comforting to be curled up on the blanket with Father, Mother and the other children while the storm shook the little house. "A place of — refuge — " I thought. My world might be full of hostility, bafflement and disappointment, but I could always come back to the bright, warm, love-filled refuge of home.

At home, in the center of everything, there was Mother.

Even though Mother was terribly old — almost thirty — she played with us like an older sister. We tagged around after her while she worked, taking it for granted

that she could dust the furniture and play spelling games at the same time, or iron and discuss baseball.

One afternoon when Leola and I came in from school, we found Mother ironing on the back porch, Carter and Jonnie lying on their stomachs at her feet drawing pictures of airplanes on some old letterheads of Father's. Baby Elizabeth was in the canvas jump-swing in the kitchen doorway, and Victor Benson, Leola's younger brother, was bouncing absently up and down, up and down on the edge of the army cot at the far end of the porch. Leola and I dumped our books on top of the golden-oak icebox and confronted Mother, demanding that she act as referee in the current phase of our chronic, bickering feud. Mother listened to us fairly patiently for a while, but her face looked flushed and she stamped the iron down on the tablecloth she was ironing with extraordinary vigor. Leola and I drifted, still arguing, over to the army cot beside Vic, just as the two little Elysson girls from across the street came through the screen door, each with an armload of dolls.

"Move over!" Leola said bossily to Vic. "We want to sit here!"

"We're going to play house," said Ruthie Elysson, importantly, squatting down on the other side of the ironing board from Carter and Jonnie. "Carter, you be papa."

"I can't!" said Carter loudly. "I'm busy."

"You get off this cot! I was here first!" shouted Victor.

“Waaaah!” added Elizabeth, mouth wide, eyes shut.  
“Waaah!”

All of a sudden Mother put the iron down on its stand with a loud bang. “Get off the porch!” she said, in a cross, terrible voice. “Get off the porch — all of you!”

A great, shocked silence fell on us. We all looked at her with enormous, frightened eyes. But like the angel at the Garden of Eden’s gate, she stood at the screen door, pointing outside. One by one, in a stealthy, uneasy haste, we slipped by her pointing arm into the back yard.

“Here!” she said to me, as I crept past. “Take the baby with you! Take her for a ride in the buggy!”

And she locked the screen door behind us.

We all stood in a silent, apprehensive row in the back yard, looking up at the porch. Mother kept on ironing. She didn’t look at us, and her iron flew in great sweeping arcs over the ironing board.

Then suddenly she looked up and glared in our direction. “Sometimes,” she said accusingly, “*I wish I were an old maid on a mountain!*”

We looked at each other in mystified discomfort, then stared back at the porch. Leola and I, looking back until we rounded the corner, pushed the baby carriage toward the front sidewalk.

“What do you think is the matter with your mother?” Leola asked in a low, portentous tone. “Do you think she’s sick, maybe?”

“I don’t know.” I kept looking back at the house as if

I expected the roof to go up in blazes any minute. We circled the block twice. At last, attracted by Carter's shout from the back yard, we rolled the baby buggy around the house. Glory be! Everything was just as always — the back door banging open and shut, and Mother whistling in the kitchen. In a minute she came out on the back steps with a stack of old jelly glasses in one hand and a pitcher of lemonade in the other. We all crowded around her. No lemonade ever tasted so good. The back yard had never looked lovelier. The corrugated tin garage with its wire bustle of chicken pen, the row of gnarled old peach trees, the over-long grass littered with toy wagons and dolls and tricycles — it was a beautiful, admirable place.

Mother had stopped ironing and came out and sat on the steps with us. "I see something that begins with 'k,' " she said briskly, and we all began shouting, happily and hoarsely at once, bumping her with our elbows, slopping lemonade on her shoes.

That night at supper, Jonnie looked up abruptly in the middle of the meal. "Mama," he asked with polite concern, "do you want to be an old maid on a mountain?"

Mother gave him a quick look and said swiftly, "Why, no, Jonnie, of course not!"

"Children get the queerest ideas in their heads," Father said, laughing a little. "What put that idea in your mind, Jonnie?"



“Have another piece of corn bread, Chris,” Mother said. “I like being just what I am, Jonnie — right here at home with all of you.”

Carter and Jonnie and I sighed in a satisfied trio. Everything was all right in the square frame bungalow on Madera Street.

Mother made life *fun*.

Every holiday, every birthday was an event — to be marked by some sort of celebration, even if it were only wearing our best clothes to school.

In Coreton we'd been poor, but now in Blanchfield we were even poorer. One Christmas even buying a tree was out of the question, but Mother managed to impart such a special importance to a Christmas Eve ceremony in which we each chose a chair to hold our expected presents that we didn't even notice the omission. And every Christmas she brought out the big box of limp red and green rope, crumpled red paper bells and strings of tarnished tinsel fringe. It was a distinct honor to be allowed to arrange those familiar, faded decorations around the living room. Whether to hang the biggest bell in the front window or dangle it from the chandelier was a question of breath-taking seriousness.

And part of the charm of the parsonage was Grandma's three months' visit each winter. When we left Coreton, Grandma had sold her house and moved to Long Beach, California, where she shared an apartment with an energetic spinster named Allie who subsisted on raw vege-

tables and health bran and who could, Grandma said, kick the top of the door and turn somersaults. Although Mother never seemed quite as joyful over Grandma's yearly appearance as we children did, the sight of the white-haired, erect figure descending the Pullman steps was always a welcome one to me. Grandma always brought an air of affluence to the parsonage; she supplied small, extra frills both to our wardrobes and our menu.

There were other visitors at home, too. Sometimes a missionary would arrive for a week's visit or an evangelist would stop by overnight on his way to the Coast. Home was the best and brightest thing in my life in Blanchfield — it was refuge.

And Father, at home, was refuge, too. Although at church, behind his pulpit, he always seemed stern, remote and Jehovahlike, at home he was a good first baseman on our alley baseball team, an invaluable, all-wise referee for our arguments, and our enthusiastic guide and chauffeur on mountain and desert trips.

With Father, we saw the West. As often as possible on his trips around the state, Father took the whole family along, even after baby Eunice arrived, and even when Grandma came over from California. We explored Arizona from one end to the other, even parts of it where precious little provision for automobile travel had been made. Sometimes the desert towns we visited charged more for cold drinking water than they did for

soda pop. Sometimes the high old Dodge stuck deep in sand and had to be excavated with shovel and plank.

Perhaps those long car trips over twisting desert and mountain roads, with the open tonneau full of alkali dust and squirming children, were not an unmixed pleasure to Mother but she played "seeing games" with us and led us in parched-lipped singing.

Mother always sang, too, when she got uneasy about Father's driving or the condition of the road. When the highway clung like a hair to the side of a canyon, with the cliff dropping away out of sight below, Mother would move a little toward the inside of the car, take a firmer grip on baby Eunice and launch into, "Leaning, leaning, leaning on the Everlasting Arms."

She sang a good deal, because Father had a natural affinity for mountains, particularly the stern, rock-ribbed kind, unadorned with frivolous streams, ferns or trees.

Once we were driving up the tortuous, narrow road from Prescott to the mining town of Jerome. There were even signs along this route boasting smugly of the number of hairpin curves the road made. Mother started singing a few miles out of Prescott, and she kept moving farther and farther in along the seat, until she was almost under Father's elbow. Pretty soon she stopped looking at the road — a marcelled string up the cliff ahead of us — and kept her eyes firmly on the sheltering bank to the left of the car.

Safe in the arms of Jesus,  
Safe on His gentle breast,

sang Mother, a slight tremolo in her voice.

All at once Father stopped. He inched the dusty, top-heavy old Dodge up against the road bank and got out.

Mystified, we all followed him.

Father pointed upward to the cliff across from us and stood, hat in hand, looking up intensely, thirstily, as if he were gazing into the very face of God. Across the canyon a vast red mountain rose in tremendous, sweeping steps to a throne-like pinnacle. Though the base of the rock was in shadow, the sun had turned the summit into a living flame.

Father quoted Scripture.

"The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself: the world also is established, that it cannot be moved. . . .

"In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also."

Standing beside Father then, I felt Zion's walls high and firm around me. And with God — and Father — for me, who could be against me!

Often I had that same staunch feeling of refuge in our church services. On Sunday morning, with the sun streaming in through the white, frosted-glass windows, with all the brothers and sisters in the Lord around me,

with Father on the platform, I felt secure and protected.

Standing shoulder to shoulder with the other members of the congregation, it was deeply comforting to sing "I'm over the Jordan's tide . . . I'm in the land of Canaan, abundantly satisfied." Even when Sister Wells shouted, with ear-piercing shrillness, "It's true, Brother, it's true!" I still felt the surging satisfaction of belonging — of being one with this small band, torn out of the darkness of sin to stand together defying the blackness of the world.

But sometimes even the church failed me as a refuge. The last year we were in Arizona, when I was in the eighth grade, Brother Reuben Vaysey, the Hell Fire Preacher, held a revival meeting for the Blanchfield church.

Nothing about the evangelist, when I saw him at the parsonage, prepared me for the staggering effect of his preaching. He was an enormous, placid-seeming, smiling man who was always chuckling a huge, round, shaking chuckle that seemed to rattle against the walls of the room.

Along one side of the Blanchfield church auditorium hung a row of red burlap curtains, behind which were a half-dozen Sunday School classrooms that could be opened into the main sanctuary if need arose. Mother usually brought all five of us children to church, but she ordinarily put Eunice in her baby carriage in one of the classrooms under my care. There I could still hear the

sermon, but I could keep an eye on the baby, too, and pop her bottle into her mouth if she started to cry. On this first night of the Vaysey revival campaign Leola was with me, keeping her eye on Winston, her new baby brother. The light from the auditorium, filtering through the heavy curtains, made a sort of eerie half-gloom in the cubicle. The familiar chairs and small table in the room took on odd, unfamiliar silhouettes, distorted by the twilight.

Leola and I settled ourselves cosily between the two baby carriages, our feet out in front of us on the rungs of near-by chairs. Our continual friction was usually less at church than anywhere else; some political instinct made it seem inappropriate for the two preachers' daughters to quarrel at church. We whispered cautiously during the opening songs, announcement, money-raising and prayer. We were still whispering when the evangelist rose to speak, and at first his voice came through the curtain only as a heavy, antiphonal background to our murmured conversation.

Then, in the same moment, we both fell abruptly silent. It was as if the first cold wave of tension from the audience had washed against the curtain and trickled in to us. I was conscious, all at once, of the gloom in the room, of the heavy, breathing, tangible silence in the auditorium, under the somber lash of the preacher's voice.

Brother Vaysey was telling the story of a man being

burned to death. *The man was there.* I could smell scorched flesh. I could see him writhe. I could hear the fire crackle.

*And I heard him scream.* The evangelist put all the excruciating, writhing torture of the half-dead man into that scream. It rang, in horrible echoes of pleading and agony and hopelessness through the quiet building.

Leola and I were clutching each other and staring tremblingly at the curtain. *Make him stop — please make him stop,* I was saying silently over and over. *Make him stop!*

But inexorably, devastatingly the Voice came through the curtain. It was Hell he was talking about, the Voice said. Hell, where man's torment went on unendingly, unceasingly, forever and forever and forever. Will YOU escape? asked the Voice. Will you?

"God knows your inmost thoughts. He sees your hidden desires. He knows the Sinner, even when he walks about clothed as a Saint!" I knew the Voice was talking about me.

I had sinned. I had thought blasphemy. And though even Father didn't know it, God did. I stood alone in the ringing darkness.

There was no refuge anywhere.

## Chapter Five

“O daughter take good heed . . .”

FATHER WAS PREACHING ON MODEST DRESS THE night the Greys and Olneys came visiting. The two middle-aged, well-dressed couples came in during the singing of the first hymn, so no one had an opportunity to get their names at the door.

Eyes in the little church kept straying in their direction. Unlike most visitors, the strangers sat down near the front, and even though they wore no badges, there was an air about them that seemed to mark them with officialdom. They were from out of town, too; in a place the size of Blanchfield we knew everyone, even the Catholics, by sight.

“Those people might be a pulpit committee,” Mother whispered to me under cover of the song. “Oh dear, I do wish your father would preach on something else this evening — something a little more — *spiritual!*”

Father always believed in diagnostic preaching. No vague generalities for him; if he felt that members of his congregation were falling behind in paying their



tithes, he was apt to take for his text, "God loveth a cheerful giver." If attendance fell off at evening services, he'd be sure to choose for his Sunday morning Scripture, "I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'"

And evidently this time he'd found other shortcomings among the parishioners. When he rose to preach, he didn't alter his usual emphatic style — nor his subject.

"My text tonight," he announced crisply, "is, 'Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.'"

He told his listeners that quiet, unobtrusive garb was the mark of a true Christian, that clothing should never distract the eye of the beholder. And once again, he reminded his congregation that the True Believer manual forbade the wearing of gold — including wedding rings.

"Sister Merriam doesn't wear a wedding ring," he pointed out with satisfaction. "And if you'll come down to the parsonage at dinnertime, you can see our wedding ring around the table."

Most of the false, artificial standards for dress and behavior were stemming from one place, Father said. From Hollywood — the home of the movie industry, with all its kindred evils. In fact, from California in general —

the home of the bathing beach, the Bathing Beauty, and the one-piece bathing suit.

The visitors listened with impassive, interested faces.

In closing, Father again repeated his text and sternly adjured his feminine listeners to adorn themselves, not with costly array, but with a meek and quiet spirit.

Pulpit committee, or no pulpit committee, Father had preached his convictions and preached them hard. But when he finished, he asked Brother Ray to pronounce the benediction and he tiptoed down the aisle, during the prayer, a practice he usually disapproved.

Mother had been right. The strangers were a pulpit committee, he told her later, as we all gathered in the kitchen for an after-church snack.

"From Los Arboles, California, right outside Los Angeles," he said. "Nice people though."

"California!" said Mother, widening her eyes. "Do you mean they came all the way over here to listen to you?"

Father grinned at her as he cut himself a piece of cake. "Maybe they can't hear any good preaching over in California," he said.

Mother gave him a look out of the corner of her eye. Her voice was demure and sweet as she asked, "They didn't say anything about your sermon afterwards, did they?"

"No," said Father laconically. "Don't believe they did."

Mother sighed a little. "I wish you hadn't said what you did about California. Too bad they didn't hear your morning sermon. It was so much more — uplifting."

Father was in an unusually jocular mood. He reached over and pinched her cheek. "Don't you worry," he said. "California people need preaching on modesty worse than anyone else, I'd say."

Ordinarily I'd have been thrilled at the chance that we might be going to California. We'd taken two trips over to visit Grandma in Long Beach and to me California was secretly a little more desirable homesite than Heaven.

I could still retrace last summer's trip, mile by mile in my mind — the start from Blanchfield in the dusk, to avoid the desert heat; the mysterious, exciting banner of white road ahead, picked out briefly by our swift-flying headlights; the great bridge across the Colorado River, like the gate to the Promised Land. Even the slow, careful miles over the narrow board road through the Imperial Valley sand dunes were thrilling. "The setting for *The Winning of Barbara Worth*," Mother told us, as we edged carefully onto a turn-out to let an eastbound car go by, its occupants waving and shouting at us. Then the date palms and truck gardens of Imperial Valley gave way to more desert, to brown desert mountains, and we were flying down the long grade into the cool, ocean-scented greenness of Canaan, of the Promised Land, of Southern California.

The two weeks in Long Beach had gone by like a day, but we three older children still talked about the court apartment houses, built with a strip of garden down the center, about Grandma's wonderful, ingenious apartment where the furniture all folded into the wall, about the forbidden Pike with its enormous roller coaster, about the beach and the ocean. We'd gone to a big family picnic at Bixby Park, and it had seemed just like Coreton again, with Grandma there and the three Awnts, who had sold their white houses in Coreton and moved to Los Angeles.

But right now I wasn't at all sure I wanted to leave Blanchfield. Horrid and dismaying as school had been for the first two or three years, I was gradually making a small place for myself in it. Miss Standish had asked me to write a playlet for Good English Week, and I'd not only written the drama but produced it and acted in it as well. Everyone in the eighth grade had been in the play and rehearsals had taken up a period a day for over a month—even though, to my consternation, the actual final production only lasted about three minutes.

Then there had been the contest conducted by the Christian minister, too.

The Reverend Charles Overfield — we always referred to him as the "Campbellite preacher" — offered three prizes, five-dollars-and-a-Bible, three-dollars-and-a-Bible, and just-a-Bible, for the three Blanchfield Grammar

School students who could memorize the largest number of Scripture verses in two weeks.

Carter and Jonnie and I had been almost sorry we'd told Father about the contest; it seemed to us that as soon as he heard about it, he dropped everything else and concentrated on the three of us. He met us at the door, Bible in hand, every night when we came home from school, and from then on till suppertime, we all chanted fragments of the Holy Writ in trio, duet or solo.

Perhaps because Carter displayed more aptitude, or because of the fact Father had him marked for a ministerial career, Cart got the most concentrated drilling. For him, Father had selected the book of John to learn, and the rest of the family, perforce, memorized it with him. The continual drone of Carter's memory work seemed to penetrate to every corner of the house day or night. His singular, rhythmic rendition of the first chapter, in particular, clung annoyingly, inescapably, in the mind, like a popular song.

Inna beginning was the WORD  
Anna word was with GOD  
Anna word WAS God.  
Anna same was inna beginning WITH God.  
All things were made by HIM  
And without Him was not ANYthing MADE  
That was MADE.

Jonnie was learning various Psalms. I had several chapters in Isaiah as my portion. When the three of us got

going at once, there was something magnificent about our combined choral antiphony. It was an anthem without music. At first we chanted slowly and falteringly, with frequent reference to score, but toward the end of the second week we were all racing along with thundering verve and speed, if not expression.

To our surprise when we went into the auditorium Friday afternoon after school, there were only a half dozen other contestants. Father's drilling had given us the feeling that we were to be pitted against hundreds of glib, accomplished competitors. The Merriam family won the Blanchfield Grammar School Scripture Memorizing Contest at a walk. Our nearest rival broke down in the middle of the Twenty-third Psalm. Carter won first prize, Jonnie second, and I third.

The Reverend Overfield made the awards the following week in assembly. It was the only time my name had ever been called out before the entire student body and the thrill was almost complete. I did wish, secretly, however, that the honor might have come in something a little more glamorous — the basketball throw, for instance, or the fifty-yard dash.

As for the prize, I felt that my two weeks had been practically wasted. I already had two Bibles and a Testament. Carter and Jonnie's money was much, much rarer in our family than Bibles.

Beside the signal honor, however, there was one lovely thing about the contest — Father was extremely proud of

us. He announced our winning in church and for a long time thereafter, whenever he had visitors, he managed adroitly to bring the conversation around to Scripture-memorizing.

So when Father got the letter from Los Arboles a few weeks later inviting him to take the pastorate of the True Believer church there, I wasn't at all sure that I wanted to leave Blanchfield. At the moment I was looking forward to the greatest event in my life — Graduation! Surely we wouldn't leave before then, I begged, reminding Mother with dramatic anguish that she'd already bought the material for my graduation dress.

Father listened to me absently. "We have to pray about the matter first, anyway," he said, looking again at the letter. The salary at Los Arboles would be twice what Father was getting at Blanchfield. There was a modern, furnished stucco parsonage next door to the church. Los Arboles had a population of 15,000 — bona fide. Just to be sure, Father looked it up on a California road map. Fifteen thousand people waiting to be converted!

Father's prayer, although fervent, was quite short. We were going to Los Arboles!

Mother set my mind at rest; we wouldn't leave until after my graduation.

The school had decreed that all graduation dresses should be of white, sheer cotton, and Mother made me a pretty dress, burgeoning with ruffles and bows and lace.

Father, as soon as he saw me in it, decided that my arms and neck loomed up too plainly through the transparent fabric and insisted, even over Mother's tentative protests, that she make me an underslip that would render the dress completely opaque. I was still fuming over this indignity when the package came from Grandma Webster in Nebraska. Two beautiful pairs of silk hose — my very first! But they were flesh-colored. Father insisted that I send them back. After all, he'd just been preaching on modesty to his congregation. Modesty, like charity, began at home!

I stormed and raved, looking with idolatrous eyes at the thick, luscious, orange-colored silk. "Nobody would ever think that was the color of my legs! I won't give them up! I won't!"

But I did.

Nevertheless, when graduation night came, I felt as beautifully modish as everyone else. No one seemed to notice my long-sleeved petticoat, and at the last moment, in the interests of uniformity, we had all been required to wear white stockings, anyway.

Everyone was in a high, affectionate mood and even my old tormentor Effie told me she hoped she'd see me at Blanchfield High that fall. I felt utterly sad and bereft to tell her that I was moving away. Blanchfield that night seemed unquestionably the bright golden hub of the universe.

When the pianist began to thump out the *Poet and*



*Peasant* overture and I followed John Morango's white shirt-and-trousered back down the auditorium aisle I felt a great stirring of nostalgic affection for the ugly tan stucco buildings and dusty, littered playgrounds. I listened with intense concentration as the Presbyterian minister assured us that the young people of today were the citizens of tomorrow, and when he closed with a quotation from Longfellow about "standing with reluctant feet where the brook and river meet," I was overwhelmingly sure that this was the most important evening of my entire life, that my diploma was a document second in importance only to the Declaration of Independence.

When the last graduate had seized his ribbon-tied scroll and returned to his place, Mr. Kraft, the principal, rose and announced that he would now present the various honors won by the graduates, beginning with students who had earned pins for having been on the Honor Roll for two successive years.

"Will those who are entitled to pins please come to the platform?" he asked, and with my heart beating till the ruffles on my meager chest bounced, I followed the other five honor-rollees to the stage. One by one the other five stepped forward as he called their names to receive the little white box and applause from the audience.

"James Engells."

"Mary Sandoza."

"Peter Romolski."

"Marian Quackenbush."

“Louise Ellis.”

I took an eager step forward. Mr. Kraft gave me a puzzled, annoyed glance and turned back to the audience.

“These five students,” he said, “can be proud of the impressive record they have made during the past two years. These pins represent a standard of . . .”

The other five, each carrying the small, precious white box, were passing in front of me and descending the stairs. I still stood, numbly and uncomprehendingly, for a long, dazed moment, then not knowing what else to do, I hurried after them, my head down and my cheeks burning.

A tiny, amused murmur rippled across the audience, but it subsided under a roar of applause as Mr. Kraft called the championship baseball team forward.

The rest of the evening was a complete blur. I couldn’t even remember, afterwards, marching out of the hall. At home Mother and Father were sure that I must be mistaken — that I wasn’t entitled to the pin.

“But I was! I was!” I was sure that I had done something idiotic, ignominious, unforgettable. I was shaking with a nervous chill. “I was on the Honor Roll every month! I was! I was!”

Father, so rarely demonstrative, held me in his lap and rocked me, my long legs dangling incongruously over his knees. “You can’t depend for happiness on things in this world,” he told me. “Temporal, material things al-

ways let you down. You have to keep your eyes fixed on Heaven.”

His steady voice, his unfamiliar, pillowing shoulder, were far more comforting than his words. Heaven was an actuality, but it was far, far away. The high Blanchfield stage, the puzzled, watching eyes in the auditorium, Mr. Kraft’s annoyed face — they were close.

Father quoted Scripture, rocking back and forth in the squeaky rocker.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Out of the soreness of my heart I wondered, *Does that mean if I were really good, really like Father, I would have got my honor roll pin — added unto me?*

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,” quoted Father. He rocked steadily in silence for a long time. Then he said, “But I do think I’ll go see Mr. Kraft the first thing in the morning.”

Mr. Kraft was apologetic. It was an oversight, he said, a matter of the records. He presented me with the pin with affable, beaming smiles and shoulder pats. He complimented Father on what a good, quiet student I’d been. But even though he put a notation in the newspaper to the effect that “Hannah Merriam was inadvertently omitted when . . .”, I still hated Mr. Kraft with a good, quiet hatred.

And one thing graduation had done for me — now I was completely eager to leave for California.

## Chapter Six

*"O the land of an unclouded sky . . ."*

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN A NEW CHURCH WAS always dismaying. The eyes watching, the handshakes, the introductions with unpronounceable, odd names that could never become as easily familiar as the Sedonickies and Jernigans and McConaghys back home, back in Blanchfield.

As usual, we joined the church en masse the first Sunday morning in Los Arboles, standing in a long, stiffly starched row, inside the altar rail, facing the new congregation. The line, I thought self-consciously, had stretched a good deal longer since the morning four years ago when we'd stood in front of the Blanchfield church members. Now little curly-haired Elizabeth stood next to me, and Mother had fat baby Eunice in her arms.

Father, however, acted as if he were proud of the generous size of the family. He made his well-worn joke about the wedding ring around his dinner table, and

taking chubby, auburn-haired Eunice from Mother's arms, held the baby up for the people to see.

"Our youngest, Eunice Martha, eighteen months," he catalogued, and the audience murmured, smiling admiringly at Eunice's cherub face.

"Sister Merriam." Mother smiled bravely, perhaps glad that Father hadn't announced *Mary Webster Merriam, thirty-one*.

"Hannah Mildred, our eldest. Hannah is thirteen and will start high school this fall."

I knew what the audience saw — the round, freckled face, the tall, skinny awkward frame I'd stared at with rueful regret that morning in the mirror. I was growing so fast that my white ruffled graduation dress was already short. I grimaced painfully at the audience and wished I were grown up — sixteen and beautiful — so that they would murmur with admiration as they had for Eunice.

"Carter Webster, eleven, seventh grade."

Father went rapidly down the line.

"Jonathan Williams, nine, fifth grade." The two boys looked enough alike just then to be twins. Jonnie had suddenly started shooting up, so his cropped brown head and lively brown eyes were almost on a level with Carter's.

"Sara Elizabeth, three." Again the congregation murmured in pleasure, looking at Elizabeth's tight, fair ringlets and round, baby blue eyes.

"And my mother, Atlanta Merriam — Mother Mer-

riam." For Grandma had joined us, moving up from Long Beach to take a small gray-shingled cottage three doors from the parsonage. She smiled sunnily at the audience, her bright blue eyes and aureole of silky white hair giving her the look of a Mother's Day card illustration.

And now came the part I always dreaded. Father always asked for a word of testimony from each of us. Mother and Grandma led off, saying first that they were glad to be at Los Arboles, telling when and where they were converted and testifying finally to their present triumphant state of grace.

Jonnie and Carter each mumbled a rapid and inaudible sentence.

Was I a Christian? Should I testify? I remembered my mutinous, blasphemous thoughts in Blanchfield. God knew my secret heart. How could I tell these people that I, too, was "just now, this minute, ready to go to Heaven"?

All at once, though, looking at their friendly faces, it was easy. During the past week since our arrival, we'd all found the Los Arboles members unusually warm-hearted and cordial. Already I knew three nice girls my age who would be starting at Los Arboles High with me in September. I could see them now, sitting together in the audience. Jane Ferris with her black braids wound in two enormous rosettes on either side of her twinkling face, the two Vale sisters, smooth blond heads bent my

way. My voice had a new ring of confidence. I was over in Canaan. *This was California!* This morning, whole-hearted and fervently, I was glad to be a True Believer.

Being a True Believer was fun that whole summer. About half the time I was out at the Ferrises' — a wonderful French family who piled all eleven children into two rickety old cars when they came to church. At the Ferrises' besides Jane, there were boys and girls of assorted ages in each direction up and down the scale. Sister Ferris fed us on homemade French bread and enormous garlicky casserole dishes at a long board table in the back yard. With a horde of neighbor children, we raced through the orange groves around their big house playing games in a farewell frenzy — Jane and I — knowing that we were going into high school in the fall and would be far, far too grown up and old for Beckon Wanted and Run Sheep Run.

Being a True Believer was particularly wonderful when I went to my first California district assembly. In Arizona, being a True Believer had been a lonely thing. Here we saw hundreds of True Believers, including a good many that we'd known in other places, Pardue, Coreton and Blanchfield, because in time, everyone seemed to come to California. People kept rushing up to shake Father's hand — one of his old professors at Pardue, a church member from Coreton, and even Willie and Birdie Kalston, who immediately suggested that he apply for a wonderful pastorate they knew of up in

Alberta, Canada. "Great opportunity!" Willie boomed. "Big wheat center, grand little town, too. Population about 20,000, I'd say and . . ."

Father raised a mildly sardonic eyebrow and smiled his infrequent rusty smile. "By the census?" he asked with dry politeness. "Or is that *evangelistically speaking*?"

Being a True Believer was an upsurging, heart-warming, throat-catching thing when the assembly audience, several thousand strong, burst into singing.

One of them, one of them,  
I am glad that I can say  
I'm one of them.

The thundering, stirring music was all around me; I was borne on the crest of that pulsing, magnificent roar of sound. I could see God, marching at the head of his hosts. All at once I felt sorry for anyone who wasn't a True Believer. Pity the poor Presbyterian, I thought, as I sang, with my head thrown back and my mouth open, who must pace with a slow-gaited hymn to the measured strains of a pipe organ!

Smiles and songs and "Amens" and the sure, mighty blast of a trombone and the intoxicating syncopated marching notes from the grand piano and a thousand voices singing, "I am glad that I can say I'm one of them."

Hallelujah, I was a True Believer!

And at first, it seemed as if going to Los Arboles High



School was going to be just as wonderful as everything else in California.

The pattern of school life was fascinatingly new and absorbingly different, made up of the clang of my metal locker door, the ringing of bells, the rushing torrent of feet in the stone corridors every fifty minutes, the long, jostling laughing line in the school cafeteria each noon and the fun of choosing your own food from the flavor-scented steam tables. The pattern was made up of impressive new studies — Algebra I and Spanish I and Orientation and Public Speaking and Gymnasium and Sight Singing and English I. It was meeting Jane Ferris and Corinne and Betty Vale in the halls, of finding excitedly that we shared some of the same classes, of buying a stiff-backed loose-leaf notebook with the school seal on the cover, of owning a fountain pen and of learning to carry books with stylish languor low on one hip. It was assembly with wonderful, cryptic yells for the football team; it was gym class with the pell-mell rush to change into gym clothes, the thudding of running feet on the polished hardwood floor and the slapping bounce of a basketball re-echoing in the tall concrete building, the hiss of a hundred showers and the sudden protesting universal scream as the cold water hit a hundred bare, shivering bodies at once. And it was handing in an English composition, "My First Impressions of Los Arboles High School," carefully copied on to white loose-leaf notebook paper in my new back-sloping handwriting

with a circle floating above each *i* and ending each sentence.

My first impressions of Los Arboles High School? "I have never," I wrote with the dogmatic authority of a world traveler, "seen any school anywhere with such attractive buildings or such a good School Spirit."

Another wonderful thing about Los Arboles High was the middy and skirt uniform required. Although it was fashionable to groan and complain about the costume, secretly I reveled in the delicious fact that I looked just like everyone else in my starched white and navy blouse, and crisply pleated skirt. Even though Father insisted on an unfashionable length for the skirt, a few turns of the waistband a safe distance from the house brought the hem up to a deliriously stylish height just above my skinny knees.

I was so elated by the sudden sunniness of life that I bounded around the house like an overgrown puppy, carried on long, giggling telephone conversations with Jane Ferris and the Vale girls, and talked high school incessantly and breathlessly to anyone within earshot.

Father found me irritating. In Arizona I'd been a quiet, tractable little girl who spent most of her waking hours at home with her freckled face buried in a book. Now all at once, I seemed to be always in the foreground, awkward, loudmouthed and inescapable. When he descended the church steps Sunday morning after church, he was annoyed to see me and two or three girls in a

shrieking, giggling huddle, loudly conspicuous in the middle of the home-going church members.

Why couldn't I be more like Carter, he wondered. Carter was responsible, serious and hard-working. He had a paper route and bought most of his own clothes, while I was beginning to insist on silk stockings that developed runs with expensive regularity.

And then, all at once, Carter too, became a problem.

He seemed to come home every day with the evidences of a fist fight prominent on his anatomy, and he developed a sudden odd propensity for talking out of the corner of his mouth. He could make even "Pass the bread" sound like a gangster's "— or else —" ultimatum.

But still worse — he became a gambler!

His paper route took him through one section of the downtown business area. At first he'd been dissatisfied with this feature of his job because it meant that he had to dismount and wheel his bicycle beside him as he delivered the *Star-Tribune*. But after a while, his grumbled protests subsided. His earnings seemed to mount weekly along with Father's pride in him.

My few attempts at after-school work had been abortive. I'd taken care of a church member's baby while she went out one evening, and had gone so soundly to sleep that it had taken her an exasperated forty-five minutes of window- and door-pounding to rouse me.

Once when Carter was sick I'd taken his paper route, but I was so wobbly riding his bicycle that I'd run over

a little girl's hand. My first impulse at her shrieks had been hit-and-run, but I was so unnerved I fell off the bicycle in a messy tangle of *Star-Tribunes* and crawled around the sidewalk picking them up while three irate women soothed the little girl and berated me.

But Carter, too, incurred Father's displeasure — in fact, his rare wrath. One evening Carter came home, his brown eyes alight with excitement and dumped a double handful of nickels on the dining-room table. "Lookie!" he crowed jubilantly. "There's a keen slot machine down at Sol's Sport Palace on Main Street. I got all these out of it."

"Hot doggie!" yelled Jonnie, running for his penny bank. "I'm going down there, too!"

Father, who had been reading his Cruden's *Concordance* near by, looked up with unbelieving eyes. *Carter! Slot machines!*

"Come into the study, Son," said Father in his saddest, grimmest tone. "I want to talk to you."

Presently we heard Father's lecture on the evils of gambling being punctuated by the sharp slap of the razor strop and Carter's loud bellows.

Father couldn't understand his children. We'd attended every service every Sunday morning, in addition to most Sunday evening and Wednesday night services. We'd apparently listened to his sermons. We knew, didn't we, where he stood — where the True Believer Church stood — on gambling?

"No games of chance," the Manual said distinctly, Father pointed out. "Sin will creep in," he told Mother, in the baffled tone of a dust-battling housewife. He couldn't understand what had got into the children!

For there was the matter of the high school dancing class. Every Friday in gym class, we were taught dancing. Most of it, true enough, was folk dancing — the Virginia reel, the schottische, and the quadrille — but the instruction also included the fox trot, the one- and two-step and the waltz. Somehow I neglected to mention at home this feature of Los Arboles High School's physical education program. Each Friday for several weeks I galloped awkwardly and perspiringly around the gymnasium while Miss Donovan played "Beautiful Ohio" and "Turkey in the Straw" over and over again.

Then Sister Vale telephoned Father. Betty and Corinne weren't in my gym class, but their schedule included dancing, too. Betty, who was always a repository of all the principles Father desired for me, had told the teacher she wanted to be excused from dancing, but Corinne felt that since the minister's daughter was dancing . . .

Father put down the receiver. "Hannah!" he called.

"But it's only dancing with girls!" I protested with loud, futile tears. "Jane Ferris takes dancing, and her mother doesn't even care. Sister Ferris says she used to dance and that no one would ever be able to go to a dance hall and dance the steps we're learning at school.

She says at a dance no one's going to tell their partner to go get six other people and come back and do the Swiss — ”

“Hush!” thundered Father. “Sister Ferris’s conscience is her own. I can’t understand why you didn’t tell me you were dancing at school. What kind of influence do you think you’re having on the other high school students in our church? The preacher’s daughter should always set the example.”

The familiar phrase signaled the end of the argument. I knew I was licked. Miss Donovan read Father’s note without comment. “All right,” she said briefly. “On Fridays, you may sit with the girls who are *Excused*.”

Excused! Of course! My spirits rose, briefly, and then fell. Everyone was allowed her three-day-a-month excuse from gymnasium exercise. But after all, no one would ever believe that I — *every Friday!* No, it looked very much as if I was going to have to *let my light shine, stand up for my principles, and show my colors*. Those were Father’s phrases, not mine.

I was acquiring my own phrases — *be a good sport, a swell kid, know the score*. In Arizona, belonging to the crowd had seemed an impossibility, but now it seemed as if only Father stood in the way.

Passionately and intensely, I wanted to be just like everyone else. I wanted to wear orange-pink rouge and a slave bracelet; I wanted to have my hair cut short and

marcelled. I wanted to ride in a sign-covered stripped-down roadster. I even wanted to go to a movie.

Ellen Pryor was living with us now. A pretty brunette eighteen-year-old, she'd come over from Blanchfield to work in the Los Arboles telephone office, and Mother had suggested that she come and stay with us. The parsonage was crowded to bursting already, but with another baby coming, with so many of us needing school shoes and lunch money and locker fees, Ellen's board money would be a great help. Fortunately, Ellen was from a good-sized family herself — and lonesome. She didn't mind sharing the front bedroom with me or a clothes closet with Mother, the little girls and me.

I loved having Ellen there. She was grown up; she had a box of rouge; she had ruffled pink underwear and bottles of fancy perfume. She had high-heeled shoes and a pair of pearl button earrings and a white felt cloche hat that came clear down over her eyebrows. Her black hair was cut in a windblown bob, and the ends curled out in fashionable ebony crescents on each cheekbone. But most thrilling of all — Ellen went to the movies!

She'd been brought up a good True Believer, too, and she still attended church and Sunday School devoutly every week, putting a tenth of her earnings into the little tithe envelope. But at least once a week she also attended the forbidden, sinful Rialto theater downtown. She'd come home, still laughing over the wild antics of Harold Lloyd or Buster Keaton, or with her eyes red from weep-

ing over Lillian Gish's death or Al Jolson's rendition of "Sonny Boy." I'd lie in bed, popeyed and openmouthed while she told me the whole movie from beginning to end and described the clothes worn by the female star.

The Rialto was on my way to school and I'd always walk a little slower when I passed, absorbing out of the corner of my eye the gaudy images of the fabulous, glittering, wonderful, wicked movie stars — Pola Negri with her great, dark, burning, eyes and tiny pursed mouth, cute Colleen Moore waving a pennant from an ad for a college picture, and the fascinating new mystery woman, Greta Garbo. On the posters her eyelashes looked almost as long as the fringe on her maribou negligee. I knew Father was right, that movies were full of Sin, of dancing and naked women and divorces and all kinds of evil, and I was sure that I would never, never step inside a moving picture theater.

Nevertheless, as I edged slowly by the Rialto on my way to school one Friday morning, I was remembering with happy anticipation that Ellen was going to see *Body and Soul*, with John Gilbert and Greta Garbo, that evening, and she'd promised to tell me the whole thing, from beginning to end, as soon as she came home.

That morning at assembly time, after "The Star-Spangled Banner" and announcements, the lights dimmed, the stage curtains parted to reveal a big white screen, and enormous black letters announced HARRY LANGDON IN "CHOP CHOP CHINATOWN."



I turned hot and then cold. I was sure that God would strike me dead any minute. A still, small voice, very still and very small, reminded me that I could get up and walk out of the auditorium if I wanted to.

I put my hand on the seat in front of me and started to get up, but just then the whole building rocked with an enormous roar of laughter as the comedian on the screen slipped on a banana peel, tripping a fat woman who fell on top of him. I sat back down. The comedian staggered up, just in time to be knocked over by a man on a bicycle. I began to roar, along with everyone else, as the poor, sad-eyed little man fell into manholes, was chased by policemen, hit by flying custard pies, dangled from roof edges.

Ohhhh, it was funny! I laughed until I hiccoughed. I laughed until the students around me turned and looked at me. My laugh abruptly died with the end of the picture.

*A picture! A movie!*

I crept home that afternoon, as full of gloom as a gravestone catalogue. Father would have to know. I knew I would never feel easy again until I'd told him. Anyway, someone else would if I didn't.

To my overpowering relief and surprise, he didn't seem very upset about my sin. "You could hardly help it this time," he said judiciously, "since they didn't tell you ahead of time they were going to have a movie. I suppose

it may have been a good thing — if it satisfied your curiosity about the movies once and for all.”

I gave him an amazed, cautious look. Was Father a mind reader?

“Well, yes, it did,” I said with brave candor.

“Was there anything uplifting about the picture? Did it make you a better person for having seen it? Could you say that it was any help to you in any way at all?” Father catechized me, his eyes friendly but grave.

“No. No,” I said each time. “No.” All at once, though, I remembered how silly the little man had looked when the flower pot fell off the balcony and hit him on the head. I bit down hard on a giggle. No, the movie hadn’t been uplifting. It hadn’t been helpful. But it had been awfully, awfully funny!

Father was turning over in his mind the perplexities of bringing up a child in a modern public high school. He sighed and rubbed his cheek with his open palm.

“I guess,” he said in a worried, practical tone, “the best thing for you to do is go to the dean of girls and tell her you want to be excused from assembly movies in the future.”

Go see the dean of girls! Walk through that girl-crowded office, alone, up to the terrifying, Boston-voiced, imperious Miss Ellie Barker! And tell her *that*!

With abrupt, hopeless clarity I saw that this was to be my punishment. I had thought God was letting me off

lightly for my sin. Father had been lenient — but *God* knew I could have left the movie if I'd wanted to. This was retribution.

Thinking of Miss Barker's office, with the white sheep of Girls' League officers on one side of its center railing and the black sheep of rule breakers waiting for judgment on the other, I could see myself standing in front of her desk, hear the words I'd say, see the veiled, incredulous, amused eyes turning in my direction around the room. I could see the tall, beautiful Girls' League president, Pamela Chandler, staring puzzledly at me. For a glazed-eyed, sick instant, I was back in the circle of fifth graders on the Blanchfield school grounds, my head on my knees, my skirt held in frantic, clutching hands over my long, black stockings.

California had been too good to last.

All at once I realized that I had another choice, an alternative that surely wouldn't be wrong. When the lights went down for the next movie, I'd get up and go out. I wouldn't have to see Miss Barker at all.

## Chapter Seven

*"Oh, why not tonight?"*

WHENEVER I SAW FATHER HANGING OUT THE long canvas sign across the front of the church, my spirits always fell hard. For one thing, no other church in town, except the Pentecostal, wore a canvas sash. REVIVAL MEETING TONITE 7:30. EVERYBODY WELCOME, said the red letters on the familiar old banner, and if I'd been wearing the sign myself I couldn't have been more conscious of it.

We'd been in Los Arboles several months now and I'd seen no sign of the canvas sash. In Blanchfield it used to seem to me sometimes that the church was never without it. Perhaps, I thought vaguely, the people in the Los Arboles church wouldn't even need a revival meeting. They all seemed wonderfully good and Christian to me.

Informal as our regular church services were, there was a comforting familiarity about them. Although the song services featured rollicking, jingling rhythms, there was the warm feeling of shared, hearty singing in them. When little Sister Morley prayed, you could see her in

your mind's eye, nothing but frail bones and incandescent spirit. You knew that she was talking directly and beseechingly to an old and understanding Friend.

Church was always our main social event.

The True Believers didn't hold with the worldly entertainment program carried on by the "big, formal churches."

"Oyster stews and book reviews; round tables and square dances," was the scathing way one True Believer evangelist referred to the frivolous goings-on inside Presbyterian and Methodist edifices. Planned social activity in our church was limited to the annual Sunday School picnic in August and to an occasional decorous party for the teen-agers, featuring Scripture-reciting contests and a ten o'clock benediction.

Nevertheless, or perhaps because of this, we all looked forward eagerly to each church service. If Sister Holbrook wasn't in her place in the third row, everyone knew that she had come down again with that old heart trouble of hers. When Brother and Sister Keeters were late to prayer meeting, we knew that Grandma Keeters had been acting up again and they'd had to wait till her sleeping pills took effect.

As for the younger fry, church services were the setting for complicated and romantic maneuvers. When Dottie Sloane swished up the aisle on Sunday evening to sit with her mother, we all knew that she and Jack Gibbons weren't on speaking terms again. Otherwise, she'd have

been sitting in the next-to-the-back row with the other teen-age girls, in front of the row of teen-age boys who always took the back seat. When a couple broke away from the two rows to sit together farther up, it was as good as an announcement, and their friends began to plan kitchen showers and charivaris.

No one stayed away from church on any account less than illness or death. Bad weather or fatigue or duties at home were not considered bona fide excuses for church absence. One thing that ministered to this faithful attendance could have been the surety that staying away from two or three services would bring Father, stern and searching, knocking at your door. When Father turned his keen, clinical eye on your state of grace, it behooved you to have some satisfactory answers ready, or you were likely to find yourself and Father kneeling side by side in your living room, discussing your backslidden state with the Authorities above.

Although I might dream secretly of Gothic arches and robed choristers, I still wouldn't have missed our regular Sunday morning church services for anything.

Evangelists and revival meetings, however, were something else again. I was sure that St. Cyprian's, over on Naylor Street, never had revivals.

Undoubtedly there was something not quite refined about conversion. I had once passed the Presbyterian church about nine in the evening and, instead of "Are You Ready for the Judgment Day?" or "Almost Per-

suaded," the Presbyterians were happily singing, "Safely Through Another Week." My theology was shaky, but I had a misty idea that Episcopalians and Presbyterians were probably born converted. It was only the True Believers who must kneel at an altar rail and wrestle with their sins.

I was trying to work an algebra problem at the dining room table the evening Father first began to talk about a revival meeting for Los Arboles. Mother was sitting in a rocker near me, hemming diapers for the coming baby — the ones Eunice had worn had been pretty threadbare already by the time they got to her.

"I've been thinking some of calling Betty and Bill Overholt," Father said ruminatively, getting up from his chair and walking back and forth in a way he had when he was talking a problem out. "They always draw a big crowd. The children like Sister Overholt's object lessons, and Bill's a good preacher, but they *are* expensive. We'd have to put them up at the best hotel."

I stopped puzzling over the baffling nature of  $x$  and thought dreamily about Sister Overholt and her beautiful clothes. It was almost like having a fashion show when the Overholts held a revival. Sister Overholt came in a different lovely, expensive dress for every service. I could still remember the beautiful outfit she'd worn when she and her husband held the evangelistic campaign at Phoenix. I'd heard that the Overholts had a girl my own age — very pretty and very wild. I did wish Father would

call the Overholts, turning around in my chair to listen.

"What about Jonathan Cuppy?" Mother asked. "He held us a good meeting in Blanchfield."

I remember Brother Cuppy well. He was a big, florid man, built on the general lines of William Jennings Bryan. He cultivated the same manner and wore his hair in the same flowing mane. His biggest drawing card had been his life story. On the night it was scheduled the Blanchfield church was packed to the doors. With lip-licking fervor the good brother described in detail how sinful he had been, how unutterably wicked, how he and his pals had drunk gallons and gallons of liquor, gambled and thieved and caroused. The story of his conversion, dealt with briefly in the closing ten minutes of the service, definitely came as an anticlimax.

I held my breath. Brother Cuppy told harrowing death-bed stories, too. I did hope that . . .

"No-o-o," said Father, running his palm up and down his cheek. "I don't believe so. Too sensational. I want someone who will nurture the members in the faith, as well as bring in converts."

"Uncle Joe Tillotson?" Mother suggested, with a warm, reminiscent note in her voice, and I listened hopefully. We children all loved Uncle Joe. He was a church tradition; he'd been a charter member at its organization and held a unique place in the denomination. A little chubby, white-haired man with a lisp and a Southern drawl, he was half Will Rogers and half Santa Claus to us. When



he came to the parsonage, we all hung on his chair, listened to his old chiming watch and looked at the pictures of his grandchildren in his billfold. And at church everyone started laughing delightedly as soon as he opened his mouth. He had such a look of beaming content on his face that anything he said was received with uproarious enthusiasm. Uncle Joe always talked more of Heaven than of Hell, more of sainthood than of sinning, and he always seemed to carry an aura of Heaven with him.

"Well, no," Father said. "Not this time. He isn't really an evangelist. I thought about Van Elder — that poetry of his is a big drawing card — but I'd rather not call someone I haven't heard. He might turn out like Scottston. I'd hate to have . . ." Then he remembered that I was in the next room and stopped talking.

I knew what he meant, though. Professor Scottston was an ex-grand-opera star who could sing you straight to the gates of Heaven and preach you to the black doors of Hell. Father had had him for one revival meeting, and ever since had been hearing unsavory rumors about him — unpaid bills, unwise flirtations, and devious financial deals.

Father tried never to discuss anything like that in front of us children, but I'd heard about Professor Scottston from some of the church members. I knew there was even some talk about asking the singer-preacher to leave the denomination.

"No one could ever sing 'The Old Rugged Cross' like that man," Mother said with a sigh, folding a completed diaper on top of the pile beside her. "You aren't thinking of Pallett, are you?"

"Well, yes, I was," Father said. "I know he's expensive, but he's out here on the Coast, so we wouldn't have to pay traveling expenses, and I've just heard that he has a cancellation in November. There's no one draws a bigger crowd than he does."

Even hearing the name Pallett always gave me a little shiver of anticipatory fear. I had heard him only once, but whenever True Believers discussed evangelists, Pallett was always the first name mentioned. He was a small, wiry, dark man with horn-rimmed glasses and an unruly shock of black hair that kept falling over his forehead when he preached. Out of the pulpit he seemed insignificant, quiet and rather effeminate looking, but on the platform he was an artist, and the material in which he worked was raw human emotion.

"Pallett," said Father in a firm, decisive voice. "I'll pray about it and ask the Board, but I don't believe we could find a better man."

Even though he might occasionally make a mistake in his choice of evangelist, Father would never have omitted the twice-or-more yearly revival meetings. To Father, the crowning moment of his ministry was the sight of a new convert shouting in holy joy beside the altar.

But to me, the coming of a revival meeting meant

mingled fear, shame and apprehension. It always seemed to me that during an evangelistic campaign all the good steady salt-of-the-earth people like the Ferrises and Vales and Comptons were submerged under a noisy tide of Hausers and Jankens.

Still more dismaying was the emotional turmoil a revival meeting always brought to me. Between meetings I was usually fairly certain that I was a Christian. But inevitably, with the coming of an intense, dramatic evangelist who described the anguish of damnation or the terrors of the tribulation period after the Second Coming of the Lord, my certainty slowly dwindled, sputtered and died.

So now I looked forward to the arrival of Brother Pallett with secret, inward anguish.

The first Sunday evening of the campaign I volunteered to stay home with Eunice and Elizabeth, and since Mother didn't care whether we went to church or not on school evenings, I didn't attend the revival until Friday night. Then, drawn irresistibly, I went. Jane Ferris was there, too, and in mutual unspoken agreement we chose a seat as near the rear door as possible.

That night Brother Pallett preached on Hell. Before he had been talking five minutes my palms were damp and my mouth dry. Sitting there in the warm, lighted, comfortable little chapel, I could smell brimstone. Darkness was tangible around me. I could hear the screams of the ever-dying. It was as if there was no light, no rest, no

friends, no hope or peace or happiness anywhere. It was as if darkness and evil were pressing against the windows of the church, waiting behind each door.

And when he finished and fell forward exhaustedly with his head on his folded arms on the pulpit, it would have been a hardened sinner who could resist the appeal to come forward now, tonight, before it was everlastingly too late.

"Will those who are Christians please stand?" Father asked, coming forward to stand beside the pulpit, where Brother Pallett still stood with his head on his arms. The pianist began to play the soft, mournful notes of "Almost Persuaded."

*Should* I stand? *Was* I a Christian? I remembered the movie at school, the dancing class, my consuming interest in the movies relayed to me by Ellen, my yearning for jewelry and make-up. I sat still, my face burning, my eyes avoiding Father's searching, agonized gaze as it swept the audience.

Seems now some soul to say,  
"Go, Spirit, go thy way"  
Some more convenient day  
On thee I'll call.

The sad, wailing notes of the hymn were a dirge. People were standing up around me, moving into the aisle and walking forward, to kneel at the long altar rail. Good people, people much, much better than I.

All at once there was a stir through the congregation. I

raised my head. Father had come down from the platform and was standing beside the altar. He began to speak in a slow, broken halting voice.

"While I have not let sin into my heart," he said, "I feel that I have grown cold in spirit, that I have let the business of life crowd out the things of God. I believe that I can be a better Christian, so I have come, too, to kneel at the altar."

*Father!* Why, Father was the best man on earth! Someone behind me broke into loud sobbing. People all over the room were standing and moving forward. I was swept along with the tide. The altar was too crowded; I found myself kneeling beside the front pew. Looking back, I saw that all the pews were empty.

If Father could confess that he was less than righteous, surely I was the most miserable sinner of all, I thought, burying my face in my arms. All around me, men and women, boys and girls were standing to say that they had "come through," that they were forgiven. But still I knelt. The prayers and songs around me were like a bright ocean washing by, while I was a small, dark, stony island. Now that the feeling that had swept me forward had subsided, I was left with a heavy, lonely sense of depression. What was wrong with me, I wondered? Why was I always so torn between two opinions? Life for other girls, outside the Church, seemed so pleasant and easy, so unbothered by the dark, inward turmoil I carried with me all the time.

Sister Compton, her round face worried, her white hair escaping in woolly streamers from the knot on top of her head, knelt beside me, put her arm around me. "Are you on the Lord's side?" she asked gently.

I nodded. "Yes," I said, and saying it, was sure that I was. "Yes, I am." Those other things, the things I wanted at school, weren't important compared to God — and Father. I was a True Believer. I might as well be a good one.

On Monday as I walked to high school, I still felt shining and clean and sure. Father's familiar phrases were in my mind: "Take your stand. Show your colors. Let your light shine." Only a tiny thought flickered in the back of my mind; if there were just a few more people showing their colors, too, how much easier it would be!

Every day on my way to school I passed the First Methodist Church. I always read the Methodist bulletin board very carefully. I felt dimly that the Methodists were theological cousins of mine, since the True Believer founder, before he saw the light, had been a Methodist bishop. Once, I remembered, the Methodists had had an evening's evangelistic service, but it was announced discreetly and unobtrusively in lower case letters inside the glass-enclosed bulletin board. Several times, to be sure, large, bright-colored cardboard posters were thumbtacked to the church door, but I always saw on closer examination that they advertised potluck suppers, Boy Scout jamborees or rummage sales.

This morning, however, as I came down Main Street, I saw with high, uplifted heart that the First Methodist, too, was wearing a canvas sash. It was an omen! Los Arboles High School was full of Methodists! Perhaps my light wouldn't shine alone, after all. I hurried down the street to read the sign.

COME TONITE, EVERYBODY WELCOME, it said, in familiar red letters. My dream had come true! I read on.

Three Act Play

SINGIN' BILL FROM BLUE RIDGE HILL

Silver Offering

The Methodists had let me down. For a minute the white banner of my new faith trailed in the dust, but, with a deep, determined breath, I righted it and set out staunchly to bear it through the halls and classrooms of Los Arboles High School.

## *Chapter Eight*

*"Dare to be a Daniel"*

MY PEOPLE SHALL BE CALLED A PECULIAR PEOPLE," Father read one Sunday morning, for the opening Scripture reading. Catching this one fragment, I suddenly found my mind wandering from the rest of the chapter, as I looked around the familiar, sun-flooded auditorium. Sometimes, being a True Believer was just like having eccentric relatives whom you loved but were a little ashamed of in company, I reflected. When I was in one of my Episcopalian moods, I felt it was Father's fault that we had so many oddities in our congregation. Father always believed simply and honestly in the Bible injunction, "Whosoever will may come," and the cordiality of his handshake at the church door was never gauged by the prosperity or intelligence of the visitor.

When the Christians gave a cold shoulder to the modish, intense Mrs. Forbes Westfield, she joined our church and testified broodingly each Wednesday night that "Jesus Christ was her lover, chum and pal."

Samuel Pettinger, a lugubrious, bald-headed bachelor,



had been a member of the two Methodist churches in town — both free and imprisoned varieties — but he transferred to the True Believer church shortly after Father's arrival and rose in nearly every service to give a graphic fifteen minute account of his latest gallstone attack, pain by pain.

I was just bringing my mind back to the service when I saw the rear door open and Brother Hinshaw, the head usher, tiptoed down the aisle followed by — “No!” I breathed — the three Awnts! They lived in Los Angeles now and had been to call on us once since our arrival, but this was the first time they'd ever visited the church. They rustled down the aisle behind Brother Hinshaw and settled their furs, scarves and draperies in a front pew.

“Oh, dear,” Mother whispered in dismay, catching sight of them. “I've only got meat loaf for dinner, too.”

Meat loaf didn't bother me. I was thinking, appalledly, of the Potters. The Potters always came late, and now I was hoping desperately that for once they wouldn't come at all. The Potter family had appeared briefly in nearly every congregation in town, usually about Christmas time. They had finally become more or less permanent fixtures at our church, all thirteen of them, the city welfare department's chief problem, as well as one of mine.

Collectively, the Potters would hardly have been able to total a normal I.Q., and in one or two of the children this screw-loose state bordered on near idiocy. To see the Potters approaching church on Sunday morning was a

sight not easily forgotten. The procession usually began with William, the vacant-faced eldest, pulling two or three of the smaller Potters in an ancient coaster wagon. Full of holy zeal, William usually speeded up as he came in sight of the building and often broke into a shambling run at the last lap. Behind the wavering old wagon trooped the little girls, noses running, stockings dropping, but splendid in raffish purple and pink taffetas and burgeoning with enormous hair ribbons.

At the end of the cavalcade came Mama Potter and her two eldest daughters, faces heavily enameled with pink powder and cerise rouge, their rickety frames hung with spectacular castoffs, their spindly legs ending in run-over satin pumps.

Even Father, usually completely myopic toward feminine finery unless it was pointed out to him by some soberly garbed sister, was a little shaken by the Potters' ensembles. He suggested to the Women's Prayer and Mission Band that they outfit Maybell and Clarine and Mama Potter in something a bit more suitable for church. Abandoning the undressed African for a month or two, the Band took up the task with enthusiasm and turned out three outfits that would have done credit to Evangeline Booth herself.

The Potters received the new wardrobes with tear-smearing happiness. The next Sunday morning and every Sunday thereafter, however, they still appeared in their floating veils, beaded chiffons and dirty satins. My

father's doom-filled words on the subject of immodest worldly dress often brought forth a shrill "Amen" or "Praise the Lord" from Mama Potter, and once she ever waved a long, green, bead-encrusted glove as she crowed

The other members of the congregation might smile a little at the aberrations of the Potters or groan silently when Mrs. Westfield or Samuel Pettinger rose to talk but they accepted them into Christian fellowship without question.

But this morning, as the Awnts rose with the congregation to sing, "Bring them in, bring them in, from the fields of sin," I felt that it would be much, much better if the True Believers would do a little screening before they accepted everyone who applied for church membership.

True, standards for members' behavior were lofty. Anyone joining the ranks of the True Believers knew he must once and for all give up smoking, drinking, attendance at dances, motion pictures, horse races, circuses, carnivals, fraternal lodges and card parties. He must henceforth and forever eschew all forms of worldly adornment, including the wearing of gold and costly array. If he remained a member in good standing, he would be expected to contribute a tenth of his income to the church and to be a faithful attendant at the regular services, including weekly prayer meeting, where he would be called upon for a periodic testimony concerning his state of grace.

But that wasn't quite the sort of screening I had in

mind that morning, sitting directly behind the three stylish hats in the front pew. My eyes roamed critically over the congregation, arbitrarily rejecting and selecting True Believers, chiefly by costume.

Just then Father announced the morning solo. Leila Brandon was to sing.

"Oh, no!" I whispered in cringing foreboding. "Not Leila!"

Leila Brandon was a big, plain-faced girl, dowdily dressed and self-conscious, but her voice was a band of gold — pure, warm contralto. "I will sing," she announced, in a half-audible, hurried mumble, "'Amazing Grace.'"

She sang without piano accompaniment. With the first note, her awkwardness fell away and she gave each word its full-weighted clarity.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound!  
That saved a wretch like me;  
I once was lost, but now I'm found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

And inevitably, just as I'd expected, Sister Hammond headed for the aisle. She wept. She waved her handkerchief.

I looked fearfully at the Awnts. Their three high-arched profiles were bent on Sister Hammond with incredulous interest. I slid down in my seat.

Brother Nolan, ordinarily as close-mouthed and taci-

turn as Father, suddenly broke out with a whooping, "Glory!" I slid farther down.

Leila sang on.

When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we first begun.

A half dozen women were weeping. Hands and handkerchiefs fluttered upward all over the church.

"Glory!" shouted Brother Nolan. "Glory!"

With my miserable eyes on the front pew, I wasn't even listening to Leila. I was offering fervent silent prayer. Any minute I expected to see the three Awnts rise, stiff-backed and stony-faced, and sail back down the aisle and out of the doors forever.

But they stayed. Father preached with unusual intensity and unction, and several times the weeping and "Amens" burst out again during his sermon.

After church, the Awnts agreed to stay for dinner. Aunt Oshie even took off her veil-swathed hat and white kid gloves and helped me set the table. As she filled the water glasses at the kitchen faucet, she smiled reflectively at Mother.

"Mary," she said, "do you know when that girl was singing this morning, I almost felt like waving a handkerchief myself!"

I sighed with vast, surprised relief. And anyway, I thought, the Potters hadn't come. Or Mrs. Fu Chang.

Even though Father extended the right hand of fellowship to anyone, shabby or stylish, respectable or raffish, who lived up to the high standards of the Church Manual, there was one time when even he was a little exasperated by one of his acquisitions.

Sister Martha Fu Chang was an American woman who had married a Chinese. The groom, with rare Oriental cunning, had deserted her almost immediately, and Sister Martha had turned to religion as solace.

Reserved and silent as Father was personally, he followed the general True Believer custom of allowing "freedom of the Spirit" in his church services. Anyone who felt moved to shout "Amen" or "Hallelujah" or break into spontaneous singing was at liberty to do so. It was only during Sister Martha's short stay among the True Believers that Father ever seemed to doubt the wisdom of this *laissez-faire* policy.

Sister Fu Chang attended every service, even committee meetings and choir practice, with devout regularity. She started coming to Father's study on weekday afternoons for advice and consolation until he transferred these consultations to the parsonage living room.

In church she always chose the front pew directly below the pulpit and sat with her lean, intense face turned up toward Father, and her great, burning eyes following his every move.

To make matters worse, during the sermon she always murmured a steady stream of "Amen, praise the Lord,

that's true, Brother, Thank God," in a slow, slumberous monotone.

Father squirmed.

Father stuttered.

He looked at the ceiling.

He ran his finger jerkily around his collar.

He moved to the other end of the platform as he preached, but each time his eyes came back to the audience he found that soulful, enraptured gaze enveloping him.

Father stood it as long as he could. One night at Wednesday prayer meeting he was trying to give a short talk about the imprisonment of Paul and Silas — against the just-audible *sotto voce* from the front row.

"— and Paul and Silas were thrown into the Roman dungeon —"

"Amen, Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!" murmured Sister Martha, hypnotic eyes upturned.

"— the — uh — dark of midnight was around them. There was no one to help them. In their extremity . . ."

"Thank God, Brother, yes, Lord," whispered Sister Fu Chang ecstatically.

"— and the hallelu — I mean, the Roman jailer —"

"Amen, praise the Lord —"

Father stopped. He fixed Sister Fu Chang with his steely gray gaze. The murmur stopped in mid-breath.

"Sister!" Father said sternly. "*Never, never thank God for the persecution of His disciples!*"

The chanting obligato was absent from the rest of the service. From then on, so was Sister Fu Chang. She transferred her membership to the Old Paths Tabernacle over on the other side of town, but for once, Father lost a church member without regret.

As hard as our regular "Amen" chorus was for me to endure, the occasional outbreaks of shouting in service were even more mortifying. When, under the emotional spell of a meaningful hymn, Sister Beulah Hammond rose from her seat and walked up and down the aisle, crying aloud, I'd feel despairingly that her loud weeping could be heard at least a block from the church.

But there was one advantage Los Arboles had over Blanchfield, for me — the *differentness* of the church wasn't so conspicuous. I didn't feel, as I had in Arizona, that everyone in town knew everything that happened at our church, knew all the eccentricities of every member thoroughly. The size of the high school, too, was comforting.

While I intended to stand up for my principles and let my light shine, still it was a relief to feel that in most of my classes I was only *Merriam*, *Hannah*, a name on a roll call, a girl who got A's on her English themes and D's on her algebra tests, had freckles and was skinny but might be a Methodist or a Baptist or a Catholic or a Christian Scientist or nothing, for all anyone knew.

Except in gym class, where I now sat on the side lines each Friday, I could revel in my anonymity — until



Father telephoned Miss Barker about the weekly assembly movie.

"You called Miss *Barker!*" I almost whispered it, when Father told me. I couldn't have been more surprised and appalled if he'd said he'd got in touch with the Angel Gabriel, long distance.

Father evidently didn't think he'd done anything out of the ordinary. "Yes," he said. "She was very nice. I knew you didn't want to go talk to her, and since there are quite a few of our young people facing the same problem, I asked her to excuse the whole group from the motion pictures. After I explained how I felt, she said she'd be happy to."

It was a relief to know that I'd not have that problem any more, I admitted to myself. It never occurred to me what course Miss Barker would take in excusing us, and I went to Friday assembly without any foreboding of what was to happen. We didn't have a movie every time, and because I had had no order to report to study hall instead of to assembly I sat quite calmly through the opening announcements and school song.

Not until Miss Barker appeared on the stage beside the principal did I feel a little uneasy.

"The dean of girls will announce the movie today," Mr. Payson said pleasantly, and all at once I began to have a panicky idea of what was coming. I cast a wild, futile look back at the door, but it looked miles away.

Miss Barker talked about the movie at some length.

She told what an educational, clean, moral and uplifting picture it was and how helpful it should be to anyone. She pointed out that the showing was sponsored by the high school P.T.A. Then she stopped, cleared her throat, and said sadly:

“However, a certain group of students has asked to be excused from seeing this picture because of religious reasons. We have given them permission to absent themselves during the movie. I would suggest that they leave now.”

A ripple of interested murmurs swept across the auditorium. Every head turned to look as we stood, a dozen or so of us — a half dozen True Believers, one Free Methodist girl, a Mennonite boy — and walked down the endless, echoing, eye-walled aisle to the distant, distant doors.

Well, I thought, whether I want to or not, I’m *standing up for my principles*. Surely now there wasn’t a single person in Los Arboles High School who wouldn’t recognize me on sight.

Father was right. We were a “peculiar people” indeed.

## Chapter Nine

*"Brighten the corner where you are!"*

NOT ALL THE TRUE BELIEVERS FELT THE SAME way about conducting Saturday night street meetings downtown in Los Arboles.

Old Sister Gretsbauer, a sharp-tongued Pennsylvania Dutch woman, who still wore the little black bonnet of her earlier Mennonite days, considered the street meetings undignified and told Father so.

"Nodding by those meetings is accomplished yet," she said firmly one Sunday morning, as she blocked the out-flowing stream of traffic in the church door to talk to Father. "Dose people downtown is goot church members, nodt bums. For streed meetings you should better go down to Los Angeles."

Father considered this politely. "Well, Sister Gretsbauer," he said, shaking hands automatically with other members while he talked to her, "if the street meetings don't reach souls for the Kingdom, I wouldn't mind giving them up. Saturday is a very busy day for me, anyway.

But I feel sure we reach a lot of people who don't go to church."

Sister Gretsbauer looked dourly unconvinced. She shook her bonneted head. "Nodt one new member from street meetings, yet," she pointed out succinctly and, womanlike, sailed on down the church steps, closing the argument.

But the conversion of Arlene Faulkner silenced even Sister Gretsbauer and confirmed Father's decision as to the necessity for the weekly street meeting at the corner of First and Main and led eventually to my being appointed street corner organist.

Oddly enough, I never held this against Arlene, in fact, she always had a great deal of glamour for me. Although she had abandoned the imitation leopard-skin coat and the red spike heels in which she made her first appearance at the church, there was still an entrancing aura of sophistication about the slender, auburn-haired woman, even after the auburn began to fade noticeably week by week to plain brown.

It was her testimonies on Wednesday night that particularly appealed to me. Her stories always gave brief fascinating glimpses into a life of wild riot and revelry — front-row seats at prize fights, playing cards *for money* at the Elks' Lodge, all night dances at the American Legion hall.

When Arlene rose to speak, I always sat a little forward on my folding chair. I waited intently for the Lot's-

wife glances she always cast over her shoulder, even though Arlene always pointed out how cheerless and sordid her life had been until the night she'd passed the True Believer street meeting Father had been conducting downtown.

"I'd come home and stagger up the stairs," Arlene would say, with a note of shamed, reminiscent laughter in her voice, "and try to decide which to take off first, my shoes or my earrings, they both hurt so much."

Or, "They're having a Mardi Gras carnival ball tonight over at the Loritan Club. That's where I'd be, wearing a silly costume and dancing my feet off, if I hadn't passed the corner of First and Main that Saturday evening last August."

When I wasn't dreaming about being an Episcopalian, I sometimes used to imagine myself in Arlene's castoff red sandals, fluttering hectically from whist game to waltz contest. I felt secretly that Arlene had paid a much greater price for her regeneration than, say, Ben Scribner, who always testified that he'd been converted at the age of five and had never, to his knowledge, committed the smallest sin.

And, reluctant as I was to make the admission, Arlene was certainly a credit to her street-corner conversion. As Sister Arlene Faulkner, she was a dynamo. She finished off the mission home-study course in half the scheduled time. She memorized Scripture even faster than Carter

could. She taught a Sunday school class of incorrigible small boys and subdued them to awed silence in short order. In a few months she was even appointed to a district church office and the rumble seat of her sporty red roadster was usually piled high with bundles of church literature for distribution, a borrowed typewriter or boxes of delegates' badges.

When a soloist rendered "The Ninety and Nine," a good many eyes in the congregation would stray significantly in Sister Arlene's direction. As Father always pointed out, if the street meetings never reached another person, they had been worthwhile through bringing this one outstanding soul into the fold.

Nevertheless, there were still a good many of the True Believers who didn't attend street meeting and, in fact, seemed pretty careful not even to pass the corner of First and Main on Saturday nights. My sympathies lay completely and entirely with them.

Only once since we arrived in Los Arboles I had, in a masochistic fervor, attended street meeting and stood sharing a hymnbook with old Brother Mahan Priestley, squeaking miserably through "Throw Out the Lifeline" and "Brighten the Corner Where You Are."

For weeks after my appearances on the corner, I'd see a classmate looking at me in civics class or sight singing and I'd feel sure he'd seen me at street meeting. Whenever I saw two girls with their heads together whispering,

I'd *know* they were talking about my street-corner appearance. I vowed nothing would ever drag me out of the house on Saturday night again.

Father had never insisted that I attend street meeting, and I could usually find some urgent duty at home on Saturday evening, since we never, under any circumstances, left shoe polishing, dress pressing or hair curling until the Sabbath day.

Then Father acquired the folding organ. He'd seen it in the window of a secondhand store downtown one day — a real bargain, he said — and had thought immediately that it was just what he wanted for the song service at the street meetings. However, he hadn't reckoned on the difficulty of securing an organist. There were several good pianists in the church but when he began to ask them, one by one, to play on the street corner Saturday nights, each of them had a watertight, cast-iron reason why it would be impossible, completely out of the question, for her to be present.

I was elected. Even though I felt that there was no hope of escape, once Father made up his mind, I tried. I pointed out that my playing was only mediocre at home and grew markedly worse in public. I mentioned the enormous number of tasks I had waiting for my attention, none of which could be performed at any time except Saturday night. Father was helpful. I could press my Sunday dress and polish my shoes right now. As for my playing, he knew it wasn't very good, but public practice

was evidently what I needed. And I did want to help in the Lord's Work, didn't I?

There was, at least with Father putting the question, only one answer to that.

All week long the thought of Saturday night lay like a burn along the edge of my consciousness, but I kept pushing it back. Anything could happen before Saturday night. Perhaps the Lord might come! For once, even the dreaded Second Coming seemed as glorious to me as it did to Father.

When the two cars from our church drew up in back of the Market Basket at seven-thirty on Saturday night, I saw with plunging heart that the streets seemed even more crowded than usual.

"Fine crowd," said Father, helping Brother Pickett lift the folding organ out of our back seat.

I stood and looked down toward the corner and wished recklessly for a catastrophe — a nice, street-engulfing earthquake or a lovely tornado.

"Come along, Daughter," Father said briskly, and I followed the organ down the block to the corner, where Brother and Sister Albens were waiting. Brother Albens, tall, stooped and bald, was carrying his trombone case and little Sister Albens was holding a stack of paper-backed hymnbooks in her arms.

We gathered at the curb, a drab cluster of long skirts and somber, dark suits against the light, bright background of a California small-town street, with its run-



ning colors of passing cars, gay dresses and brightly lighted store windows.

Brother Pickett helped my father set up the organ, put a camp stool beside it and fastened an open hymnal in the rack. This was the moment I dreaded. With red face and lowered eyelids I sat down and adjusted the stops. I gave Brother Albens B-flat and D-flat and he blew a couple of soft, testing bleats on his trombone.

Striking a chord for the opening hymn, I began a silent, desperate prayer. "Oh, God, please, please, don't let anyone I know come by. Please, no one from high school. *And God, please, not Neal Sackville!*"

Los Arboles was a big school, the largest I'd ever attended. Neal Sackville, a genial, smiling, freckled football player, was student body president. He sat next to me in typing class and did me the thrilling favor of borrowing all his typing paper from me. In exchange, he occasionally carried my books down the hall to my locker and spoke to me in a caressing, politician's voice whenever he met me in the hall. Each time I floated on whipped-cream clouds for days afterwards. *Student Body President!* I dragged his name into every conversation. "Neal Sackville, he's Student Body President, he says we'll probably win the game with Hoover High next week." "Neal Sackville, you know, the Student Body —"

It made no difference to me that he had difficulty in remembering my name and sometimes absent-mindedly called me Marjorie or Alice. After all, he probably knew

hundreds of people. He sat on the auditorium platform at pep rallies and he referred to the teachers with intimate familiarity as Old Wallingstone or Old Van Hagen. He had a bright blue Model-T Ford with signs painted all over it. Every time I saw it parked at the curb by the school, I walked slowly by, reading the ragged printing again. "I Do Not Choose to Run in 1928," "No Springs, Honest Wait," "The Tin You Love to Touch," "God's Gift to Wimmen." The final, superb touch of wit, I felt, was the cowbell suspended over the hood in place of the conventional horn and attached by a long rope to the steering wheel.

I would have given my left arm, my place in the Scholarship Society, and the natural curl in my hair for a one-block ride in that dashing, debonair roadster. I daydreamed long, sparkling dialogues for that ride, conversations that would have outlasted a transcontinental trip.

*"Not Neal, dear God, not Neal!"*

During the playing of that first hymn, my spirits rose a little. I discovered that the back of the organ nearly hid my face, particularly if I hunched down a little. I bent over the keys like a composing virtuoso. Occasionally I swept the approaches with a swift, apprehensive glance.

"We will sing 'When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder,' " Father announced, in his clear, carrying voice that stopped pedestrians a half block away.

As I reached to turn the pages, I saw two members of

my gym class, June Dickson and Ann Bowyer, approaching, arm-in-arm. I turned my face quickly, but not too soon to catch June's eye and see her nudge Ann.

"Number 88," said Father sharply, and I realized he'd repeated the number twice. With clumsy fingers I fluttered the pages before my unseeing eyes and gropingly reached for a four-flats chord.

Numbly, automatically, I managed to get through the song. When I looked up again, they were gone.

"All right," I prayed resignedly. "June and Ann, God, but please, please, *not Neal Sackville*."

Father led in prayer, while the pedestrians along the street inched awkwardly by, eyes downcast, or stopped abashedly, the men removing their hats.

Brother Albens played a solo on his trombone, then Sister Albens gave her testimony. There was another song. We were just finishing it when, far down the block, I saw the unmistakable kelly green and white of a letterman's sweater. Its wearer was tall and rusty-haired. It could be no one else.

Sister Bethel Bernard, her tall frame topped by a tight coronet of black braids, her Bible clasped against her flat chest, mounted the curb at the last note of the song. She was standing directly in front of me.

I sent a quick *thank you* heavenward. It wasn't what I would have planned, I thought, but perhaps Neal was already downtown when I started praying. Perhaps it was the best God could do on the spur of the moment.

Sister Bernard was a striking figure and she had a compelling voice. "Friends!" she said. "Stop for a minute!"

A policeman's whistle would have been less effective. Feet stopped; faces turned.

"But do make him go on by!" I postscripted my prayer.

The crowd on the street corner grew. I sank lower and lower until my chin was on a level with *Allegro* and *Diapason*.

"You have planned your Sunday dinner. You have decided what you will buy in the shops. You have provided for food and shelter for your families. Have you provided for their spiritual welfare? Have you thought of your own soul? You live in a material world. You take heed for today, for today's temporal things. Have you thought of tomorrow? Tomorrow your soul may be required of thee!"

The street corner seemed deathly still. The traffic light overhead rang with startling sharpness to punctuate Sister Bethel's words. From my barricade, I couldn't see the green sweater, but I could tell from the tempo of Sister Bethel's voice that she was drawing to a climax. I hadn't heard her for four years in Sunday School without knowing her speech patterns. She would step back; Neal would walk by and would turn his surprised hazel eyes my way.

I pulled my handkerchief from my sleeve to wipe my moist palms. Sister Bethel stopped talking. Desperately, I dropped the handkerchief under the organ and made a dive after it. The organ shuddered. It was a folding

organ and it started to fold. The top came down with a bang, sending a shower of hymnbooks over my bent head.

There was a ripple of snickers along the street. I stayed down as long as I dared, but finally, with ruffled hair and purple face, I came up. I took a desperate, resigned survey of the corner.

*Neal was gone!* There was no sign of the kelly green sweater in either direction as far as I could see.

My rendition of the final hymn, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," I feel humbly certain, has never been surpassed, at least in the sincere depth of feeling I gave it.

Monday, after typing class, Neal walked down the hall to my locker with me.

"Well," he asked affably, "how'd you spend the week end, Toots — playing around?"

I darted a quick, suspicious look at him, but his freckled face wore the usual bland, satisfied expression.

I took a deep breath. "Why, yes," I said vaguely and in blind bliss tried to open the wrong locker.

## Chapter Ten

*"Narrow and strait, narrow and strait . . ."*

REDHEADED NANNETTE BROOKER, ANOTHER member of my gym class, and I waited for roll call, leaning against the wire netting around the playing field and watching an adjacent class play volleyball.

Conspicuous in the middle of the nearest team was a tall, oddly dressed figure. Among the short-sleeved middies and brief black pants around her, the enormous billowing black bloomers and long-sleeved, high-necked middy she wore stood out like an exclamation point. I could see that everyone in the vicinity was watching the tall girl, who leaped, bounced and ran as if completely unaware of the general scrutiny.

"Gad, look at her," Nannette said idly. "I should think she'd roast in all that cloth. Do you know who she is?"

I bit my lip. "Why-uh, I think her name is Lola Hauser," I said with an effort at vagueness. "She's in my civics class." I didn't add that she also, at times, attended our church. Although she and her family usually went to a tabernacle out in Lemon Park, they always appeared in

our congregation during revivals. Lola's standards of modesty were far, far higher even than Father's. She swept through the school halls in a middy skirt just as long and voluminous as her Graf Zeppelin bloomers. Los Arboles High had received her delightedly when she enrolled in school, and soon thereafter her picture had adorned a large illicit poster reading TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD, SUSPECTED OF ROBBING THE MALES. I knew Lola fairly well and liked her, but cravenly conventional as I was, I usually managed to avoid meeting her in the halls at school if I could.

Nannette was still staring. "Do you think there could be something *wrong* with her arms and legs?" she asked in a low, confidential tone. "Scars, maybe?"

I swallowed. Here was an obvious opportunity to let my light shine, to tell Nannette Brooker the meaning of true modesty. Just then Lola made a long leap for the ball and her bloomers billowed like bat wings behind her.

"Scars," I agreed. "Maybe."

I tried to rationalize my cowardice as I fell into rank in my own gym class. After all, Father himself didn't particularly approve of Lola's extreme costume. And for that matter, Jim Hauser, Lola's father, annoyed him, too.

Hauser, a big, high-colored man who was always boasting that he could eat a dozen eggs at one meal, considered himself a one-man League of Decency. His promi-

nent blue eyes were always measuring skirt lengths, eying necklines and noting lip tints.

He'd rise in prayer meeting and, moistening his full red lips, give a five-minute dissertation on the obscenity, lasciviousness and nudity of modern styles. The low chorus of "Praise the Lords" and "Amens" that underlined most of the testimonies always fell away when Brother Hauser talked, and his resonant, booming voice always dropped on an uneasy, squirming silence.

One Wednesday night he rose and reported that he'd just happened to be driving along the beach the day before. He'd been shocked, Brother Hauser said breathily, *shocked*. He described one costume he'd seen. "Just a belt," he said. "Just a belt. Nothing above, nothing below."

After Brother Hauser sat down, there was a short, uncomfortable quiet. No one else rose to testify and Father didn't change the order of the meeting but stood looking down at his pulpit Bible with three deep lines across his forehead showing plainly. I don't know whether the Scripture he read was on the open page in front of him or not, but he appeared to be reading, in a slow, measured voice.

"Finally, brethren," quoted Father, "'whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good



report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.' ”

And this time there were “Amens,” loud, fervent and hearty, from all over the house. Only Brother Hauser was silent.

Father had his own eyes fixed so firmly on Heaven, however, that he usually didn't notice what his women parishioners were wearing at all. Everyone in the congregation could have come in bathing suits and the fact wouldn't have been immediately apparent to him. However, he was extremely fond of preaching from Saint Paul's writings and the apostle seemed to have written a considerable body of material directed exclusively toward constricting women's behavior and wardrobes. Saint Paul, it seemed obvious to me, was a bachelor. Mark, Matthew, John, Isaiah — none of them ever found it necessary to be so specific about what a woman should do, say, or wear. Perhaps they were all married and knew that a woman set a good deal of store by her few frills and fragrances and that it was much easier to be a saint if you could look pretty while you were being one.

Father loved Saint Paul, and their attitudes toward women were somewhat alike. Father always found incomprehensible any feminine concentration on fashion magazine or dress shop counter. A Christian, Father felt, should have her eyes fixed on her heavenly robe and not on I. Magnin's window. Modesty and a sweet spirit were

woman's best adornment, he avowed firmly. I always planned to be the kind of woman Father admired — later. When I was old — thirty, maybe. Right now, as a Los Arboles High School student, I wanted to look just like everyone else.

I counted on Father's blindness pretty heavily, and I had learned that if I went my own way — without *discussing* it — I didn't run into too many parental taboos. Mother had a stern eye for most transgressions but a surprisingly lenient one for sins of vanity.

One Sunday morning, however, as I emerged from my bedroom ready for church, Father looked at me. Really looked at me — it may have been the first time for weeks. Perhaps the aura of self-satisfaction I was trailing had even penetrated his absorption, because for once I was feeling extremely chic. I had borrowed one of Ellen's movie magazines and arduously copied Mae Murray's coiffure, down to the last pothook curl on my forehead. While my dress was longer than I would have liked, my black patent leather belt girdled it fashionably at least a foot below my waist. And final, ineffable touch — I had a large pink velvet artificial flower on my shoulder. The flower, Mother's Christmas gift from a worldly relative, had been the target of my dreams for weeks and last night I'd finally achieved it. I thought it looked wonderful on my tan ratiné. I felt at least sixteen, three shades blonder and four inches shorter.

“*Daughter!*”

Father's unbelieving stare made me thirteen, mouse-brown haired, and five feet six again. I swept my hands nervously across the pothooks. "Yes, Daddy? I'm late for Sunday School already!"

Father ignored my hairdress and hip-hugging belt. He was pointing at the flower. "Is that necessary?" he asked succinctly.

I put a protecting hand over the luscious, curving petals. "Yes!" I said loudly, trying to back out the front door. "Anyway, Mother gave it to me!"

Mother deserted me basely. She came into the living room behind Father. "You didn't tell me you were going to wear it to church," she said. "I think it's a little old for you, dear."

Wrong words!

"I'm not a *child*!" I screamed. "I'm in my *teens*! I'll be fourteen next week! I guess you want to keep me in *rompers* all my life!"

Father pulled me back into the living room and shut the door. "I don't think you'd better wear that flower," he said. "It isn't necessary and it's too conspicuous for a preacher's daughter."

More hated words!

"It's not a *sin*!" I flared. "There's nothing in the Bible against wearing *flowers*, is there?" With the Blanchfield Scripture-memorizing contest behind me, I was fairly sure of my grounds.

"No," agreed Father, in a calm, reasonable voice. "But

there's no reason for anyone wearing unnecessary trifles like that just for adornment."

"What about your necktie?" I pointed a triumphant finger at the lively blue-and-white polka dots below his chin. "You don't need *that!*"

Father didn't even blink. "That's right," he agreed. "I don't." He took it off. He picked up his Bible and black sermon notebook and started toward the door.

Mother and I looked at each other with startled, apprehensive eyes. Mother took a step after him.

"Chris," she quavered. "You aren't — you aren't going to church like that, are you?"

"Yes, I am," Father said in a clear, calm voice, opening the door. "Maybe the Free Methodists are right about neckties, anyway."

My fingers fumbled in frantic haste at the flower. "I'll take it off, Father!" I said. "Really I will."

Mother and I were sharing a staggering vision of Father, tieless, delivering his morning sermon. She picked up the necktie and followed him, coaxingly. "Please, Chris!" she said. "Please!"

Father considered.

"I'm sure a t-tie is *necessary*, Father!" I pleaded.

Kindly, graciously, Father gave in. He allowed Mother to drape the silk around his neck and knot it. As he went on down the steps toward the church, Mother made my deep, fervent sigh of relief a duet. But then I looked down at the velvety rose in my hand, and I felt a little irked.

"I almost wish I'd held him to it," I reflected as I put the flower away with the unworn pearl necklace Grandma Webster had sent me for Christmas.

I sat brooding during Father's sermon that morning. True Believer men, I thought, did all the preaching and talking about modesty and decorum, but it was their wives and daughters who bore the brunt of their decrees. Father looked extraordinarily handsome in his dark suit, snowy white shirt — and blue polka dot tie. There wasn't a thing to mark him as being different from any other man in town, I thought.

And looking around the congregation it seemed to me that even True Believer men preferred pretty women! My Sunday School teacher, Sister Bethel Bernard, was as good as gold. She wore her dresses long, her hair severely plain and her face shiny. But people were starting, already, to call her an old maid, and now in church this morning she was sitting alone, while across the aisle Florence Parrish was cuddled up against handsome Ned Carpenter. Ned was going to be a minister; he often led the prayer meeting service when Father was away, and he had even preached once on Sunday morning. But Florence had the curliest hair, the fluffiest clothes and the loudest giggle of any girl in the Los Arboles church — and Ned was head-over-heels crazy about her.

Maybe, I thought, True Believer women had to make their own private interpretation of the words of Saint Paul — and those of the rest of the men, too. Looking

at the back of Sister Bondale's brunette head, I remembered the call Father had had to make on her. I wondered what Saint Paul would have done about Eva Bondale's hair.

Sister Bondale was about forty and widowed. Although she was very devout and even held a preacher's license, a good many of the women members were horrified when Father took her into the church. Even though she came regularly to services, testified earnestly at each Wednesday evening prayer meeting and dressed with sober modesty, some of the sisters felt that Eva Bondale really couldn't be a good Christian. For, they said, with discerning female eyes on her demure coiffure, *Sister Bondale's hair was dyed!*

Father tried to evade the issue when Sister Cottermill and Sister Lee brought the matter to his attention. "Let's not be hasty in judging," he said sternly. "Remember, 'The Lord looketh on the heart.'"

It was a poorly chosen quotation. The two women, almost in unison, supplied Father with the first part of the verse. "Yes," they said promptly, "and 'Man looketh on the outward appearance', too! Her part's black as sin."

At first, I'm sure Father had no intention of speaking to Sister Bondale, ever, about her camouflage job. But after several repeat visits from the insistent sisters, he began to see that he must choose the lesser of two evils.

"All right," he said in a resigned voice, after Sister

Cottermill's third attack. "But let's first have a few words of prayer for Christian tolerance, shall we?"

Sister Cottermill knelt promptly. There might even have been a certain victorious note in her prayer, although her words held their full measure of proper, penitent humility.

Father was stuck. He tried to get Mother to go along with him to make the call. Usually she was happy to go calling, but this time she'd have none of it. Perhaps she was even entertaining a little secret sympathy for Eva Bondale; at any rate, she turned Father down flat.

I was surprised and flattered when Father called me in and told me he was taking me with him to make a pastoral call. But I had my best dress on and was in the front seat of the car long before Father came out. His usual brisk step seemed to have slowed a little, and his driving, when we started out toward Sister Bondale's, was amazingly sedate.

Father ordinarily planned sermons or thought over pastoral problems while he drove, and his foot was apt to lie heavy on the accelerator. If any car should have borne signs reading, "Prepare to meet thy God," or "Are you ready for Eternity?" it was ours — at least when Father was driving.

Sister Bondale gave us an enthusiastic welcome. She offered us glasses of lemonade. She lent Father a devotional book she had been reading. She spoke glowingly of his Sunday morning sermon.

Father's face grew gloomier and gloomier. He sighed heavily several times.

"Sister Bondale — " he began.

"Yes, Brother Merriam?"

It took him three false starts to get the fatal question out.

Father blushed.

I blushed. I wished with all my heart to be home, at school, anywhere else.

Sister Bondale didn't turn a hair — dyed or natural. She smiled with sweet and humble piety.

"Why, Brother Merriam!" she said, widening her eyes at him in wondering forgiveness.

Father was badly off-base. "It was just that — that someone . . ."

Sister Bondale shook her black head slowly back and forth. "Why, I rinse my hair after I shampoo it, of course," she said, "but that's all. Just a rinse."

Father apologized. Not once, but several times. He was still apologizing at the door.

He was silent for many blocks as we drove home. Then he suddenly hit the steering wheel hard with the palm of his hand. His voice sounded cross, extremely cross for Father. "*Your mother* rinses her hair with lemon!" he said. Mother could do no wrong in Father's eyes. "Sister Bondale is a good Christian woman. One of our best. I think I'm going to preach next Sunday morning on backbiting and faultfinding."



I said nothing. I was thinking. Sister Bondale, I knew, was indeed a good Christian woman. Sincerity is easily recognizable. And I liked Sister Bondale very much. But the sunlight flooding through Sister Bondale's living room windows had been brilliant, harsh and revealing. I had had fifteen long minutes in which to study my hostess from a distance of four short feet.

Eva Bondale's heart, I knew with certainty, was as white as snow. But for my money, her black, black hair was undoubtedly, assuredly, inescapably — *dyled*!

I was so engrossed in these absorbing private reflections that I almost forgot to stand for the closing hymn, and for a minute I didn't notice what we were singing. Then I looked down at the hymnal and quickly, up at Father's face. He was looking straight at me, and there was an undeniable gleam in his eyes, an unmistakable twitch at the corner of his mouth.

For the song leader had chosen for the benediction hymn that melodious old favorite, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds."

## Chapter Eleven

*"Are you ready? Are you ready for the judgment day?"*

THE HOUSE WAS DEATH QUIET, TOMB STILL.

I lay wide-eyed, taut, listening, staring into the half-blackness of the room. I couldn't hear a sound, not a person breathing, not even a board creaking throughout the whole house.

Was I alone?

Had they all gone?

Was this The Night?

Outside the window the moon shone luridly between two raveled clouds. Sitting up, I pulled back the curtain and searched the sky fearfully. I tried to remember what Olin Brooks had said the evening before in church, but all I could recall was the one solitary phrase over and over, *"As a thief in the night."*

A terrifying certainty turned my throat dry. They were all gone, Father, Mother, Carter, Jonnie, the little kids.

*I had been left behind for the Great Tribulation.* Perhaps even now the Anti-Christ was stamping the Mark

of the Beast on human foreheads somewhere in the world. I felt mine. It was damp and clammy.

I slid cautiously out of bed, crept through the hall to Father's and Mother's bedroom and swung the door slowly open inch by inch. The bedsprings creaked with beautiful loudness. Mother sat up. "Who's there?" she asked in a lovely cross voice.

Flooded with enormous, aching relief, I stumbled hurriedly back to bed. So far tonight, Christ hadn't come. So far, the saints were still on earth, holding back the powers of darkness. So far, I was safe from the Anti-Christ. But as I dropped into sleep, I remembered uneasily still what Brother Brooks had quoted. "Ye know not *what* hour the Son of Man cometh."

The imminent Second Coming of the Lord was one of the foundation doctrines of the True Believer church. No minister was considered really orthodox who did not, at least once a quarter, choose for his text, "As a thief in the night," or "There shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken and the other shall be left."

Consequently I was never free from the ever-haunting nightmare of being left alone in a world peopled with fiends, devils, sinners and Episcopalians. In spite of my frequent trips forward to the mourners' bench, I never acquired any degree of certainty that I would join the great upward rush of saints on the fearful night, and no matter what my current state of grace, my heart always dropped like an express elevator when a visiting minister

announced, "I shall take my text tonight from the Book of Revelation."

The fiery splendors of the Apocalypse seemed to have an intense fascination for a great many True Believer ministers. Some evangelists had delved so thoroughly into the intricacies of Biblical prophecy that they had the Time of the End — The Second Coming, the Tribulation Period and the Last Judgment — marked off as if by stop watch.

The Reverend Olin Brooks was one of the foremost of our prophets. When he arrived at Los Arboles for a two weeks' revival campaign, he hardly cast a glance at the present spiritual state of the congregation. He preached one duty sermon from the church motto, "Holiness Becometh Thine House, O Lord, For Ever," and then, with a happy home-coming light in his eye, hurried over and settled down comfortably for the remainder of the meeting among the vials, trumpets and seals of the Book of Revelation.

He had with him a large collection of charts and maps, full of complicated lines, circles and cubistic trees, by which he traced the doomful march of disaster down seven years of Great Tribulation which would follow the removal of the saints from the earth at the time of the Second Coming.

When I was smaller, back in Blanchfield when Brother Vaysey preached, for instance, I'd always been haunted by the fear of going to Hell. But now my fear of damna-

tion had faded and my constant, haunting obsession was the dread that the Final Trump would blow, Father and Mother and everyone I knew would disappear from the earth in a single instant, and I would be left alone. And while Hell was something that waited after death, the Second Coming could happen any minute. If I were reading and the house grew quiet — an unusual thing at the parsonage — I'd look up with a frightened plunging of my heart — and go quickly to look for another member of the family.

When an evangelist preached on "Who Is the Anti-Christ? Is He on Earth Today?" I was coldly sure, along with the preacher, that He was. Benito Mussolini was made to order for the position. He looked, he acted the part. And when he began to talk of restoring the Old Roman Empire, a good many of the apocalyptic-minded began to take farewell glances around the neighborhood.

In addition to the Book of Revelation, the books of Daniel and Ezekiel, there were other sources of prophetic information. One of the most popular for a period was the Great Pyramid in Egypt. Although Father accepted Biblical prophecy, he was from the first a bit skeptical about the Great Pyramid as a guide for twentieth century True Believers. In his reading he had come across a scholarly archeological explanation of the Egyptian wonder, and from then on he looked a little uneasy when he heard other ministers refer to the Pyramid.

According to the exponents of the Great Pyramid theory, this antique structure in Egypt was put there expressly as a sort of heavenly calendar of man's existence on earth. This record began orthodoxly six thousand years ago with the creation of man in the Garden of Eden and it marked every event of importance along the way since, including Martin Luther's separation from the Church of Rome, John Wesley's separation from the Church of England and the True Believers' separation from the Methodist Church.

Of course, as the current prophet always explained, the *unit* of measurement along the calendar passages inside the pyramid changed frequently. Unless one *knew* how to interpret these changes, one might never realize the significance of the Pyramid at all.

Well, the lecturer would explain happily, flourishing a pointer at his chart, that was just what he'd come for — and he'd proceed to forecast World War I, the League of Nations and the election of Coolidge. He was pretty correct, too, since it was then the year of our Lord 1929.

I believed everything I heard. I absorbed theories, fancies and speculations, no matter how fantastic, and embroidered them with my own still-wilder fantasies. I was obsessed with Apocalypse. I had nightmares peopled with dark, leering Beasts, with enormous, flaming-eyed Anti-Christ.

One night I sat up in bed, glassy-eyed, screaming, feeling the indelible Mark on my forehead.

Mother came in and sat on the edge of my bed, her long black braids framing her concerned face.

"What's the matter, honey?" she asked, furtively feeling my face for signs of fever. I couldn't admit my fear of being left behind, for I dreaded Father's immediate spotlight focus on the state of my soul nearly as much as I dreaded the Second Coming.

"Just a nightmare, I guess," I gulped, the light above my head and Mother's reassuring presence driving the dark, lashing fears back into the shadows of my subconscious.

Undoubtedly Father would have been alarmed and grieved if he had known the effect this apocalyptic prophecy was having on me. For to Father, the Second Coming was a glorious hope, an escape from death and the grave, a speedier reunion with his Lord. To be transported suddenly from this world of sorrow and sin to the Eternal City of God was a concept of glittering beauty and joy.

When Father preached from the Book of Revelation, he always dwelt on the triumphant, singing, final chapter:

And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

*And there shall be no night there.*

Father, his face luminous with reflection from that Eternal Day, looked with fearless, confident eyes for Christ's imminent coming. And he took it for granted that the rest of his household shared his anticipation.

I was not alone in my chronic apprehension. Ed Moadrick, the son of a True Believer minister in another state, really had the nightmare experience that I feared so constantly and for so long.

*He was left behind!*

This is how it happened. The chapel where Ed's father preached was too small for the growing congregation and the church for some time had been considering the purchase of a near-by building.

One Sunday morning Ed was sitting in church when his mother remembered that she'd left the oven on in the parsonage kitchen. She sent Ed home to turn it off. While the congregation was singing, he slipped out and turned off the fire. He dallied just a little, he said — nibbled at the edge of the pot roast in the oven, peeked at the forbidden Sunday funnies. Then, poking, as even a small True Believer might approach church on a fine Sunday morning, he climbed the stairs and opened the swinging doors of the sanctuary.

*He was alone!*

The auditorium, only a few minutes before filled with singing, shuffling, breathing, living people, was empty.

A small terrified ten-year-old, Ed stood shaking with horror, unable to move. Finally he began to scream. He



was still screaming when he met the first True Believer returning from a look at the new building down the street. And it was several minutes before they could quiet him.

He told me the story, later, as a joke, but neither of us thought it was very funny.

I would have given anything to have had the sublime faith in my spiritual condition that Ben Scribner showed. One Wednesday night he rose in prayer meeting to testify. He was a tall, pompous young man with large horn-rimmed glasses. Each time he gave his testimony he preceded it with an impressive slow scanning of the people around him. This weighted, silent pause always assured him of electric attention on his words.

This Wednesday night he paused even longer than usual, sweeping the audience with his bland, superior gaze, before he turned to smile kindly at Father who was waiting a little impatiently by the pulpit.

"Brother Merriam," he said pontifically, "it makes me happy to realize that at this instant I am completely and entirely ready and prepared for the Second Coming of the Lord. If the Last Trump were to blow right now and I were taken from this earth, Brother Merriam, I'd want YOU to tell those who are left behind that I departed in grace."

Ben could never understand why even Father laughed.

## Chapter Twelve

*"Blest be the tie that binds . . ."*

THERE WAS THE WORLD AND THERE WAS THE Church. The World sometimes was bright and fascinating and mysterious, but sometimes it was something vague and evil and encircling, just outside the Church doors, just out of earshot of the gospel hymns.

It was always safe and warm and bright inside the small world of grace. In the Los Arboles church I had that feeling nearly always; there seemed to be a close-knit, intimate feeling of brotherhood among the members. The congregation was like a large, affectionate, united family. For that matter, marriages within the Church had made relatives of a good many of the members, anyway. Among the dozen or so young True Believers at Los Arboles High School, this tight clan feeling was very evident. Jane and Betty and Corinne and I got along like sisters; our occasional interfamily squabbles never interfered with our close, unspoken solidarity.

When Marcia Mitchell and her foster mother joined the Church, the rest of us welcomed Marcia with cau-

tious friendliness. We weren't sure whether we'd like her or not. Her clothes were beautiful and she had a very pretty face — natural barriers to close feminine friendships at sight.

But almost at once Marcia was a general favorite with us all. She was a vivacious, bubbly girl whose only problem in life seemed to be the tender, overprotectiveness of her adopted mother. Mrs. Mitchell, a witty, lively-eyed widow, concentrated all her attention on Marcia while Marcia loudly and cheerfully tried to throw off the silken shackles. The rest of us found the Mitchell bungalow an interesting place to visit, since, unlike our mothers, Mrs. Mitchell had nothing else to do but entertain us when we came over. I began to spend more and more time at the Mitchells' little white bungalow, and I was flattered beyond words when I was invited to spend a week with the Mitchells at the beach.

But shortly after the Seventh Day Adventists put up a big tabernacle on the main street downtown, Sister Mitchell and Marcia stopped coming to church. Marcia gave me the news at school; they were attending the tabernacle, and her mother was convinced that the True Believers were in error. *Saturday* was the real Sabbath.

I conveyed the news to Father. In his usual specific fashion, he began to preach Wednesday evening sermons on the Christian Sabbath — *Sunday*. Although Sister Mitchell wasn't present to hear these messages, I tried faithfully to transport the gospel to her. Sister Mitchell,

however, with an evangelistic light in her eye, gave me Seventh Day Adventist literature to take to Father. Father may have read it; I don't know. I did. Since I was in the habit of believing everything I heard or read, I absorbed the papers with a completely open, receptive mind. Why, I realized, the True Believers, as well as the Methodists, Baptists, Christians, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, were wrong! Sunday was really Saturday. Or vice versa. In a flash, I saw the Light. I discussed the matter at great length with the enthusiastic Sister Mitchell. We both felt sure that if Father only knew, he too would be a good Seventh Day Adventist. I eagerly carried more books and pamphlets home to the parsonage and Father continued to preach Wednesday evening sermons on the dangers of false prophets.

I spent so many evenings at the Mitchell home, anyway, that Father didn't remark the fact that I was gone even more than usual. One day, however, when I came home from school in the afternoon, Father was waiting for me in the doorway. He scanned my face with a pained, wondering look.

"Come into the study, Hannah," he said.

I followed, searching my conscience but finding it, for once, free from guilt.

"Is it true," he asked, sitting down opposite me with the same unbelieving expression on his face, "*that you sang in the choir at the Seventh Day Adventist tabernacle Tuesday night?*"

I nodded promptly. "I wore a white robe with a black tie. I was second soprano," I said, with some pride.

Father dropped his chin into his hand. "I couldn't believe it," he said. "I couldn't believe it. Whatever possessed you?"

It was my opportunity. I leaned forward eagerly. "Haven't you been reading those books and papers I brought you, Father?" I asked, with sober evangelistic zeal.

The seed fell on stony ground. No evangelist ever met with less success. Father listened silently until I'd finished my enthusiastic, if garbled, message. He didn't even seem interested in New Truth, in seeing the Light.

"What do you suppose our members will think, anyway?" he asked. "I've been preaching on the Christian Sunday every Wednesday night for a month, while my own daughter — *my own daughter!* — was down singing in the Seventh Day Adventist choir!"

The next Wednesday evening I had a prominent front seat — an assigned location — at prayer meeting. I listened meekly to Father's message. As usual, he was convincing, eloquent and terse. I looked around me at the other True Believers, my brothers and sisters in the Lord, and felt a certain relaxing sense of relief. It was, after all, pretty comforting to be back in the fold again, back with the best people on earth.

I studied them all: Brother and Sister Blakesley, who always sat on the second row from the front. They sat

closer together now; looking at them you always remembered that last year their son Ralph had been sitting there between them. When we sang, "I will meet you in the morning, just inside the Eastern Gate," Brother and Sister Blakesley were always silent and you remembered that Sister Gaywood had sung that song at Ralph's funeral.

Sister Alice Tresham always came alone and sat down near the front at the side. She was very quiet, very serious and very sweet. You'd never know when you talked to her that Mart, her husband, was furious with her for coming to the True Believer church or that the neighbors had once called in the police because he was beating his wife.

The Ferrises took up a whole pew, straight across the center section of the church. Brother Ferris, bent and gnarled from a day's carpentry, always looked dead beat and sleepy at prayer meeting, but he never missed a service. Sister Ferris, straight and tireless, sat at the other end of the pew. In between, some of the little Ferrises slept, some sat looking at books or drawing with crayons, but all were mouse-quiet, under Sister Ferris's ever-watchful eye.

You couldn't say that for the Boone children. The two little tow-headed boys were always escaping from Allie's pew and running up and down the aisle until someone put out an arm to corral them.

Behind the Ferrises sat Sister Pedersen, our apple-faced little Norwegian neighbor, who had such bashful awe

of Father. One day when she was downtown shopping, Father had hailed her from the street. "Sister Pedersen!" he called in his abrupt, peremptory way. "I'm on my way home. Come along and I'll take you up."

The little woman, without a word, climbed meekly into the car and rode back up to our street. She lingered tactfully on her front porch until she saw Father disappear into the parsonage; then she picked up her empty market basket and trudged the ten blocks back downtown again.

My Sunday School teacher, Sister Bethel Bernard, was sitting up front, as always, straight, stiff and grim-looking. Under her bleak, formidable exterior, however, I knew that she was extremely sweet, humble and conscientious.

One day Brother and Sister Noah Vickers brought their new baby to church and met Sister Bethel on the front steps. "Have you seen Junior?" Noah called out, proudly unveiling the baby's bald head. "Isn't he beautiful?"

Sister Bethel stared into the pop-eyed, jug-eared infant face, so much like Noah's own. She gulped and nodded weakly.

"Yes, he's — beautiful," she said, in a faint, miserable voice. During church, however, she sat wrestling with her conscience. It was a fixed fight. As soon as the benediction was pronounced, she hurried back to the improvised nursery, an open classroom in the rear of the auditorium, where Sister Vickers sat proudly guarding the beribboned Noah, Jr.

"Sister Vickers," the tall woman said humbly, her thin face burning, "I have a confession to make. I told you a lie. I said that I thought your baby is beautiful. I don't." She looked around with unhappy eyes; then she smiled in radiant relief. "But I do think his little crocheted cap is just darling!"

Sister Bethel, the Ferrises, the Blakesleys — these were my own people, I realized, my face hot with discomfort over what I'd done to Father by wavering toward the Seventh Day Adventists. I loved all the True Believers, every one! Largely and generously, I even included Samuel Pettinger, who at the moment was rising to testify, one hand on his ailing side.

Right here in the Los Arboles True Believers' church — that was the place for me.

So even though the letter which came the next week was from one of the biggest True Believer churches in the country, I was heartsick to learn that we were going to move on. I wept — loudly. Father, used to my frequent, dramatic tears, paid little attention. He and Mother were discussing the move as if it were an accomplished thing. He felt, he told Mother, that his work at Los Arboles was finished. In the four years since his arrival, the church building had been enlarged, the membership doubled. Denver was a wonderful, a glorious opportunity. *Denver First!* He and Mother looked at each other and smiled, remembering their other moves.

"When I decided to preach," Father said humbly, looking at the letterhead in his hand, "I supposed I'd



be out in a canvas tent or a little rented mission hall all my life. The Lord has been good to us, Mary. Our lines have fallen in pleasant places."

"Amen," said Mother softly.

I wasn't grateful at all. I only cried louder. I didn't want to leave Los Arboles — Jane, or the Vale girls or Tracy Franklin next door, on whom I now had a fervent, if hopeless, crush.

"Now remember, this is a secret here at church until your father announces it from the pulpit," Mother warned me, her voice stern.

But somehow, the word got out. *The Merriams were leaving*. Friday night, when I went to Young Women's Missionary Society, I detected a certain excitement, an undercurrent of secrecy in the Ferrises' living room, where the meeting was held.

"What are we working on tonight?" I asked Jane. We'd been making a missionary quilt but it had been finished at the previous meeting. Each of us had embroidered her name in a quilt block, and Jane and I had giggled over the future of our handiwork as we embroidered. We speculated over the quilt's probable destination. A few months before a missionary with a very fat young son had visited our church, and Jane had been all for adding another row or two of squares to our quilt, just in case it went to Somaliland.

But tonight there was no sewing to do. Alice Cartwright, the dark-eyed, Canadian schoolteacher who was

president of the society, brought the quilt in, tied in a fat, ribbon-swathed package, and laid it across my knees.

"To take to Denver with you," she said. "We hope you'll think of us when you read our names on the quilt." Looking down, I saw through the veiling tissue paper, Corinne Vale's familiar, round-bodied script, neatly traced in pink embroidery floss with a blue French knot dotting the *i*. It seemed to me, looking at her name, that only in Los Arboles had I ever had close, wonderful friends like these. Corinne and I had sat side by side in Sunday School class for four years. Together, we had been converted again in every revival meeting. We had done our chemistry assignments together and worried over civics tests and traded sandwiches at lunchtime. And we had, together, walked down the long auditorium aisle before the assembly movie.

I tried to make a speech. "Whenever I see your names —" I said and stopped. When I saw their names again — Betty, Jane, Alice, Corinne — I'd be fifteen hundred miles away, in Denver.

Father, as he nailed the book boxes shut again, took his brass name plate off the parsonage door, and fastened the luggage rack on top the car, would be whistling, I knew, his inevitable marching song, "I feel like traveling on."

I didn't. I wanted to stay in Los Arboles with the best, most beloved people on earth.

## Chapter Thirteen

*"Ten thousand foes arise . . ."*

FATHER, I REALIZED WITH ADMIRING AWE, AS our family toured the big red brick Denver First Church, was really *Somebody*! To think that this congregation, clear back here in Colorado, had heard of Father, had written to ask him to take this big pastorate, to preach in this high, impressive pulpit!

The auditorium now was empty; it was still only the middle of the week and we had the first Sunday in the new church yet to face. I pictured the long, echoing room filled with people, all staring up at Father. The idea frightened me, but it didn't seem to affect him at all. Hat in hand, he was following the custodian down the long center aisle, looking at the tall, narrow, stained-glass windows with critical, proprietary eyes. Although the Denver church was in an unfashionable section of town, it was an impressively churchly looking structure. The True Believers had bought it ten years before from the Presbyterians when the latter moved to a better location among their members out on Park Hill. Looking

around me, I thought with satisfaction that there was really no way to tell what denomination worshiped in the big sanctuary.

Evidently Father was sharing my thought, but he was finding it an unpleasing one. "I don't like that decoration on the wall behind the pulpit," he said. Following his gaze, I saw that for the first time we were in a True Believer church that didn't carry the inevitable motto, "Holiness Becometh Thine House, O Lord, Forever." I was pretty sure that Father would speak to the church board about that; I knew he wouldn't be comfortable without the familiar words above his head as he preached.

As we settled into life in Denver, I decided that from now on it was going to be easy to be a single-minded, whole hearted, devoted True Believer. For one thing, now that I'd graduated from public high school and was away from its temptations, I could surely leave forever my disloyal resentment toward Father because I couldn't attend the football games or parties, because I couldn't bob my hair or wear cosmetics or jewelry.

Now, I thought in a glow of nobility, I would devote myself to being the kind of daughter Father wanted. I had a vague mental picture of myself as a sort of assistant pastor, a sweet, ethereal creature in demure black, sitting beside Father on the church platform, the focus of admiring congregational eyes.

Although I'd always been aware that Father was undoubtedly a success as far as Heaven was concerned, a

real, true Christian, now I saw with added admiration that he was doing all right down here below, too. Quite often now he got letters from other church boards asking him to consider other pastorates, and he was also a member of several general church boards and committees, positions that required his presence at business meetings at the Kansas City headquarters on frequent occasions. I reveled vicariously in the general air of importance and affluence that now surrounded Father.

Even though the Denver church was much larger than the one in Los Arboles, Father had more leisure now, because the church provided him with so much capable assistance.

There was a music director who led the choir, trained a girls' chorus, a male quartet and provided special numbers for Father's new radio program.

There was a deaconess who made house calls, turning in neat little lists to Father each week with helpful notations: "These folks would come but the man works Sundays," or "Should send them clothes and food. Very hard up."

And there was an unusually efficient Sunday School superintendent who kept interest in the Sunday morning exercises at fever pitch all the time. Nearly every session he gave some sort of prize: for the oldest person present, for the youngest, for the largest family, or for the couple who'd been married longest. People brought aged relatives in wheel chairs and babies in bassinets; they cor-

ralled all their relatives clear back to their great-great uncles. The Sunday School swelled to mammoth proportions.

Always before, Father had kept his hand in every activity of the church work. He had found it difficult to relegate authority to anyone else. In fact, once in Los Arboles, the church board had grown worried over his intense application to his work and insisted that he take a vacation. They made it an order. "Two weeks' vacation with pay, completely away from your work. And no meetings, understand?"

Brother Eyres, the Los Arboles board chairman, had been pretty fierce about it. Just to be sure that the order would be carried out, he talked to Mother, too.

"We want him to rest," Brother Eyres said, looking beyond her with mock grimness at Father. "R-e-s-t."

"All right," said Father with surprising mildness. "I can take my typewriter along and work up some new sermon outlines."

Brother Eyres and Mother shook their heads decisively. No typewriter. No sermon outlines. Not even a fountain pen and notebook. Rest. R-e-s-t.

Father gave in. He even co-operated. As the eight of us rode up the coast in our creaking five-passenger Essex with its gray window curtains and cut-glass wall vases, Father was determinedly relaxed. He dutifully admired the ocean, averting his eyes quickly when we passed bathing parties. He drew deep, manful breaths of ocean air.

He bought us all hot dogs and ice cream cones at nine in the morning and made no objection when we dripped mustard and vanilla custard down the back of his neck as he drove. Of course, he did detour in a couple of towns to take a look at the local True Believer churches, and once he jotted down the address of an empty chapel in Carpinteria. But Father was co-operating.

We had no definite destination and finally stopped at Pismo Beach, which seemed a little less cluttered with unclothed bathers than other places we'd passed. Father rented two cabins in a seaside auto court and changed to khaki pants and a sweat shirt.

The first day we fished off the pier.

The second day we played tennis on the municipal courts.

The third morning Father phoned Los Arboles, "just to see how things were going at the church."

Early on the fourth day we started home. Just in time, too, for Father was a nervous wreck. All those interminable hours of enforced idleness, all that time frittered away when he should have been out doing the Lord's work, had settled so heavily on his conscience that he looked positively haggard. He drove so fast going back down the coast that even the babies were clinging, with the rest of us, to the doors of the Essex.

For the next few weeks Father worked twice as hard, called on twice as many members as usual, painted all the church window screens and planned an extra revival campaign.

"Things run down when you're away," he kept saying worriedly for several months thereafter.

Father's new duties in Denver didn't change his ingrained dislike for leaving any portion of his work to someone else, but he did feel that, finally, he had time to join the city ministerial association. Father disapproved of a good many of his professional brethren. Often their theology seemed to him to be composed entirely of sedatives and saccharine. One time he heard another minister say comfortably, "After all, we're all headed for the same place — just on different roads." This statement annoyed Father considerably. He didn't feel at all that everyone was headed for the same place; if that were true, he was wasting his time preaching! He knew that there were two roads, one leading up and one down, and to his notion the hill road was mighty empty.

Nevertheless, he was in a mood to co-operate with his fellow clerics, particularly if their meeting time didn't coincide with anything more pressing. Unfortunately, however, he chose an inauspicious day to begin his essay into denominational co-operation.

The ministerial meeting, which was held in the guild-hall of the Christian Church, had already begun when he slipped into a back seat. Father's thin austerity and careful grooming gave him an air of distinction, and the chairman may have thought that the group was being honored by a visit from an itinerant bishop. At any rate, after a few opening announcements, he began unsuspectingly to review an article in the *Christian Century*



entitled, "Shall We Join the Holy Rollers?" He prefaced his review with a few remarks in a kindly, patronizing tone about the "lunatic fringe — the holy roller churches like the True Believers."

Father sat forward in his seat. One of the few things guaranteed to raise Father's ire was the phrase "holy roller," especially when applied to his own beloved denomination. True Believers, admittedly, often said "Amen" in loud, hearty, enthusiastic tones. They sang lustily. Under the emotional spell of a song or sermon, certain True Believers might even stand and shout. But *roll*? Never!

Father fixed his gray eyes hypnotically on the speaker. He listened intently to every word that fell with cultured precision on the cloistered theological air.

"The writer points out," intoned the chairman, "that these small evangelistic churches draw only from the lower strata of the population and that their ministers are usually poorly paid. Most of these churches carry on little beside evangelistic efforts.

"And now," said the presiding divine in conclusion, removing his glasses and putting them carefully on the reading stand, "has anyone else anything to contribute to the discussion of this article?"

"Yes. I have!" Without an invitation, Father moved forward. Ministerial heads, gray, white, bald and brown, turned. Ministerial eyes goggled.

"I," said Father distinctly, "am the pastor of the First

True Believer Church, corner of Kenyon and Lee Streets. May I say a few words in defense of my denomination?"

The chairman, pink to his clerical collar, reluctantly yielded.

Father picked up the magazine article. He tapped it with an emphatic finger. "If the author had cared to investigate further," he informed his audience, "he'd have known that the True Believers led all other denominations last year in per capita giving. We carry on a widespread missionary program. We had the second fastest growth of any church during the past decade while several denominations have actually —" his eyes strayed significantly in the direction of a prominent local minister — "lost ground. Although it is true that most of our buildings are small, plain and poor, anyone is welcome and our auditoriums are usually crowded, even for summer evening services." He paused tellingly. One of the opening announcements had been that a union service for several of the combined congregations of the city was being moved to a smaller church because the attendance was so small.

"And," concluded Father simply, "although my salary may be less than yours, I know that God has promised to supply all my needs according to His riches in glory. He has never failed me yet. I can never begin to praise Him enough for His goodness to me."

Father went back to his seat in the midst of a long, echoing silence. Then, entirely to his surprise, the preach-

ers gave him a hand — a good, hearty, smacking round of applause. And when the meeting broke up, genial, smiling Rabbi Volsberg came up to him with outstretched hand. "We usually eat lunch together after our Tuesday morning meeting down at the Town Club Grill. We hope you'll join us today. Come as my guest."

I listened admiringly when Father told the story to Mother that afternoon. I'd have given anything to have Father's calm, sure self-confidence. Father always said, over and over, from the pulpit that a Christian was never afraid, that God delivered His children from the "fear of people." But I seemed to be afraid of everyone outside the ranks of the True Believers. I was even afraid to ask for a job in Denver, remembering my experience last Christmas vacation in Los Arboles.

Father had asked the local J. C. Penney store manager to give me a Christmas job, and I'd gone down, bashful and trembling, to work in the toy department. I'd undoubtedly set Christmas shopping back twenty years in Los Arboles. I'd given people the wrong change and the wrong parcels; I'd spent fifteen minutes trying to wrap up a beach ball which kept rolling on down the counter each time I got it half wrapped. And to climax the shattering week, I'd neglected once to fasten the coin carrier tightly in the overhead carriage when I started it on its wire-borne journey to the cashier in the balcony. Half-way down the store the metal conveyor had suddenly left

its moorings and dropped within a few feet of the manager's head, showering him and the adjacent counters with a loud confetti of nickels and pennies.

I was sure I'd be no better at any other kind of job, either. I was afraid of the Outside. I didn't want to take night classes at Opportunity School downtown. I was sure I didn't want to attend Denver University either. But I wished, contrarily, that I did want to!

My admiration for Father grew still more after his encounter with "Bible Joe." Father, surely, had no fear of people, bad or good.

The Southside Methodist pastor called Father one morning; even over the telephone his voice sounded extremely excited. "Merriam," he said quickly, "there's a crook — a confidence man — going the rounds of the churches here in town. I'm calling all the ministers to warn them. Be sure to be on the lookout. The police think it's the same fellow who held up Dr. Brooks over at Riverside Presbyterian last week."

Father was laconic. "Is the man armed?"

"Don't know. He's a well-dressed, smooth-talking sort of fellow, they say. Starts in by pretending he needs financial help for an orphanage, Dr. Brooks said."

Father had hardly hung up the receiver when the doorbell rang.

"Brother Merriam?" asked the tall, smooth-talking, well-dressed young man at the door. "I represent the Weldridge Home for Orphaned Children. I wonder if

I might come in and talk with you a little while about our wonderful work?"

Father held open the door promptly. "Come right in here," he said, leading the visitor to his study.

Although Father disapproved of dramatics, he put on an act a Barrymore would have envied. He listened with grave absorption as the visitor talked, but his mind was racing fast over possible courses of action. The ringing of the telephone gave him his chance.

"Excuse me for a second, Brother," he said. He made short shrift of the person on the wire and then called the police. Bland-faced, he rejoined his visitor.

Father was very interested in the Weldridge Home for Orphaned Children. He asked about the housing, clothing, diet, education and religious affiliations of the orphans. He branched off to politics. He dwelt long and lovingly on the weather. Still the police didn't come.

The visitor was beginning to look nervous. Father looked out the window but the curb was vacant in each direction. "Well," he said at last, "I'd like to give you a big donation. Your orphanage sounds like a very worthy work. Will my check on the First National here in town be all right?"

The visitor rose quickly. Yes, that would be fine, just fine, he told Father, as he turned his hat round and round in his hands.

Father wrote slowly, with fine Spencerian flourishes. He blotted the check carefully. Then he smiled in benev-

olent brotherhood at his visitor. "And now, before you go, shall we offer a word of prayer for the success of your work?"

The visitor, his face a little awry, knelt on one knee.

"Will you pray?" Father asked.

The visitor, with quick politeness, deferred to his host. Father prayed. He covered the local, state and national political situation, mentioning both the Republicans and the Democrats. He prayed for the missionaries, home and foreign, True Believer and general. He prayed for the visitor, for the visitor's orphanage and all orphans. He mentioned widows, the blind, the crippled and the maimed.

The visitor began to squirm a little. He cleared his throat loudly twice. Still Father prayed on, stopping only for a lightning glance out the front window. The police still tarried. Finally, defeated, Father wound up his petition. He watched the visitor, check in hand, run down the front steps and stride rapidly off in the direction of the First National Bank. Father strode rapidly off in the other direction — to the telephone. He spoke a few sharp words to the police sergeant. Then he jumped into his car and headed for the bank. He and the police arrived at the same time.

The orphan-lover was arguing with a teller over Father's check. Father's first name, the teller was protesting, was not "Cadwallader." When the two plain-clothes men closed in on either side of the stranger, he

whirled so quickly he almost bumped into Father. He said a few words very familiar to Father but completely out of their usual context.

"Brother," said Father, shaking his head sadly, "I am going to pray for you."

The police carted the smooth-tongued solicitor off to jail where he was confronted with a record longer than an elephant's memory. He was known by at least a dozen aliases, the most common of which was "Bible Joe," a title bestowed on him in recognition of his fondness for preying on ministers and church groups.

Father wasn't one to let a matter drop unfinished. For several weeks before Bible Joe came up for trial, Father visited him regularly in his cell at the city jail, pointing out to him the evil of his ways, reading to him from the Scriptures, and offering prayer.

It would have made a wonderful sermon illustration if Father could have claimed that Bible Joe saw the light and mended his ways, but Judge Henderson stepped in, sentenced Joe to five years in the state penitentiary and thus unfeelingly removed him from Father's sphere of influence.

## Chapter Fourteen

*“ . . . Hang heavy clouds of unbelief . . . ”*

I'D MADE UP MY MIND NOT TO GO ON TO COLLEGE, and Father and Mother seemed willing to comply. "You're a year too young for college, anyway," Mother said, and flattered me enormously with a woman-to-woman smile. "It'll be nice to have you home with me for a change."

But while my education had come to a sudden halt, Father had every intention now of going on with his. In Blanchfield and Los Arboles I'd often heard him wish he had time and the opportunity to take more school work.

Father always had an enormous respect for education. As far as his beliefs about God, the Bible and the True Believer Church were concerned, he was perfectly satisfied and had no desire for further scholastic exploration. He believed in the closed canon.

But information along any other line appealed to him enormously and he regularly brought home a diverse collection of books from secondhand bookstores and the public library. One month our dinner conversation and



his Sunday sermons would be sprinkled with allusions to Incan sacrifices and Mayan sculpture; the next month he would be expounding the follies of the chain-letter craze or explaining the difference between Wilton and Axminster rugs.

If a book salesman didn't mind being asked a few personal questions about the current state of his soul he found Father an ideal customer. After Father had determined the vendor's denomination and asked him to our Sunday services, he'd listen intently and enthusiastically to anything the man had to say for his products. And it must have been only the cadaverous state of the family budget that kept Father from lining our walls with sets of books in all shades of morocco. Whenever he went to camp meeting or district assembly, he usually headed straight for the bookseller's table to look over the newest collection of titles from the church publishing house. One book, *Violet, a White Slave*, appropriately bound in purple, always interested me, but Father's literary interests didn't include Violet, and he turned me down flat when I begged him to buy the book, even when I showed him an illustration depicting a fragile young thing struggling desperately in the clutches of a mustachioed brunette gentleman wearing a skimpy tuxedo.

It was Father's thirst for other literary information, however, that led to what we always referred to afterwards as the Famous Front Door Debate. The debate, entirely impromptu in character, took place one Sunday

afternoon right after church. We were all at the dinner table, still spruce in our best clothes, busy demolishing Mother's inevitable Sunday pot roast and devil's food cake, when the doorbell rang.

We were used to interruptions at every meal. Father took a farewell sip of coffee, put his napkin by his plate with a reluctant air of finality and went to the front door. From the dining table we could see directly into the entry hall.

A determined little woman carrying a square leather case stood on the threshold. Father asked her into the hall, a fortunate gesture, since it brought the ensuing tournament into earshot of the dinner table.

"Sir," said the visitor intensely, "I am the Lord's Messenger. I have come to tell you that millions now living shall never die!"

"'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment,' Hebrews 9:27," said Father pleasantly.

"I have here Father Smith's own message to his followers," said the lady, pointing to the case in her hand, "transcribed so that you, too, can hear the truth that is never told in the regular churches. Only Father Smith has the real truth."

"'No man cometh unto the Father, but by me,' Christ said, John 14:6," countered my father.

The visitor put down her phonograph. She pushed back her hat. She began to talk fast. She talked so rapidly we couldn't hear everything she said back in the dining

room, but she ended with a great flourish, “— and Father Smith’s words and teaching are above all!”

Father had been waiting. He was ready for her.

“‘If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.’ First John 5:9.”

The visitor was undaunted. She had a Scripture ready when he paused. When she finished, Father was ready with another verse. They ranged rapidly from minor to major prophet, sallied into the Psalms, skimmed the four Gospels.

Finally the missionary reached into her case for more ammunition. She brought out three pamphlets which she thrust at Father. “In these,” she said loudly and passionately, “you can read how far you have erred! How benighted you are! How corrupted with false gospel!”

Father’s rebuttal was superb. He reached a long arm around the corner of the hall door to the telephone table for his Bible. Dramatically he held up the book. Effectively he paused. Perhaps he was not unaware of his dining room audience.

“In this,” he said deliberately, “I find all the truth I need. ‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.’ Second Timothy 3:16.”

It was a body blow. The Lord’s Messenger picked up her phonograph. She tucked her pamphlets under her

arm and turned to leave. At the top step she rallied. She pivoted to give Father a triumphant glare.

"Even the Devil," she said succinctly, "can quote Scripture to serve his purpose!"

Father wouldn't allow a lady her last word. As she went down the sidewalk toward the next house, he called after her, "'And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.' Second Timothy 4:4!"

His return to his cold coffee was only slightly swaggering. He looked complacently around the table at our awed faces.

"'Search the scriptures,'" he admonished us as he cut himself another piece of cake, "'for in them ye think ye have eternal life.' John 5:39. Never know when a verse'll come in handy."

In addition to his extracurricular quest for education at secondhand bookstores, public library and our own front door, Father had an intense yearning for more formal education. He wanted a master's degree. He had intended to go on with his work right after he finished his A.B. at Pardue but a wife and six children, all with healthy appetites, are substantial deterrents to a man's search for higher scholastic attainment.

The year that Dr. A. A. Rushworth, the eminent authority on Biblical literature, came to Secom College, a large theological seminary near by, Father determined that, busy or not, money or no money, he was going to

take a few classes at Secorn, in particular, The Psychology of Prayer from Dr. Rushworth.

We were all crowded into the study the night I first heard Father talk about his plan.

"Who knows," Father said happily, as he leafed through *The Drama of Job* by Abel Rushworth, "maybe I'll get my master's. A couple of units now, another class next year — in no time I'll have it."

Mother was weaving a heel into a large black sock. "You aren't afraid of having your faith undermined? Isn't Secorn" — she glanced nervously at us children — "*modernistic?*"

Father shook his head decidedly. "I've read this book carefully and Dr. Rushworth seems very sound. Very fundamental. He's a Southern Baptist and while they aren't quite straight on some of their theology, on most major issues I can agree with them. I'm looking forward to being in a college class again."

The class in the psychology of prayer met on Tuesdays and Thursdays from ten till twelve. On the first Tuesday Father came home as enraged and irritated as his religion would permit. He had registered for the class, he had paid his good money, and now, horribly and unexpectedly, the instructor was not the Dr. Rushworth Father had expected. He was Dr. A. A. Rushworth, but neither A stood for Abel.

In fact, in Father's directory, his new teacher was Dr. Atheistic Agnostic Rushworth!

"That man is an out-and-out Higher Critic," Father announced at dinner, absent-mindedly helping himself twice to the potatoes. "He started the class by asking if there was anyone in the room who believed that prayer could be answered. And, Mary, do you know what?"

We all stopped eating to listen.

Father shook his head with dramatic sadness. "You'll never believe it. I was the only one in the class who raised his hand!"

Even baby James Webster gasped.

Mother looked puzzled. "But isn't it a ministerial seminary, Chris?"

Father looked even grimmer. "It most certainly is. Several of the students in the class are already out preaching. One man is pastor of that gray stone church right over here on Victorine Drive. But you haven't heard the worst yet, Mary! After he asked that and I put up my hand, he said — and these are his very words, *'Well, when this class is over we will be one hundred per cent in agreement, or I will feel that my teaching has been a failure!'* "

"But Chris," Mother persisted, her brown eyes round, "what kind of man is he? Doesn't the college know what he's teaching?"

Father's sigh was nearly a groan. "Mary," he said slowly, "I'm afraid I've got myself into the middle of a bed of vipers. High thinking, heretic skeptics, every one of them. But I've paid my money and I want the credits

so I suppose I'll just have to go and listen to that man say that prayer is only needed to attune us to the Universe."

Father had never felt any need of being attuned to the Universe. He didn't give the Universe much thought; he had his mind on Sister Helman's backsliding or the scampish Wiltrow boys and he applied prayer to these problems with no more delay than a country doctor would take in writing a prescription. Prayer to Father was his most practical tool and just as real and tangible as the automobile he drove or the Bible he read.

General fashions in theology, outside the True Believer ranks, seemed to change as rapidly as women's hat styles. The year that Father went to Secorn was evidently the peak of fashion in rationalism in religious thinking, and the scholarly Dr. Rushworth was rationalism's chief proponent. He took Father as his chief mission in life from the second session on. Father became an obsession with him. Every day Dr. Rushworth would bring up a new battery of theological guns, all pointed in Father's direction. Each day, after the smoke had cleared away, there sat Father, unflinching and obdurate, still stubbornly shaking his benighted, superstitious True Believer head.

Dr. Rushworth tried sarcasm. "Now look here, my good brother," he said, with a smiling side look at the rest of the class, "perhaps you'd like to tell us of some miraculous answers to prayer you've had!"

Father seemed to miss the sarcasm entirely. He walked into the trap with his eyes open. "Yes, I can, Brother,"

he obliged graciously. "This happened last week, through the mercy and glory of God."

Dr. Rushworth's expression grew faintly patronizing but the class was listening to Father.

"A young mother in my church, Sister Elsie Brooks, had been sick nearly to death with asthma. She'd had to spend several weeks in the hospital under an inhalator and the family couldn't afford it at all. She had four little children under six and there was no one to take care of them during the day while the father was at work. Last Thursday they asked me to come to anoint her and pray for her, and I did. The presence of God was in the room while we prayed, and now I am happy to say that she is completely healed of the disease and is back doing her work."

Dr. Rushworth pounced triumphantly. "Now!" he said with satisfaction. "That is exactly the point I was trying to bring out! The factor of psychology! This woman, in her simple way, had an intense belief —"

Father interrupted. "I forgot to tell you," he said laconically, "that the smallest girl, two years old, had asthma, too. We prayed for her and her asthma is gone also."

Dr. Rushworth looked a trifle taken aback. He floundered just a little. "I'd like to follow that case farther," he said loftily. "A physician's confirmation would —"

"Dr. J. R. Poole, Westside Security Building," said Father helpfully. "He's seen them both since. He can't understand it, either." Father couldn't resist sermoniz-



ing. He had a Scripture ready for Dr. Rushworth, too. " 'Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.' "

Dr. Rushworth put a hand to his forehead. He looked at the class for sympathy and he got it. But it wasn't unanimous. Several students were looking thoughtfully at Father and when the bell rang two fledgling ministers stopped him in the hall outside.

"Sir," said one of them as furtively as if he were trying to locate a good bootlegger, "I'm not sure but what I agree with you, after all."

His friend nodded timorously. "I do think it's just possible that Dr. Rushworth could be wrong."

Father gave them approving fraternal pats and one of his rare but radiant smiles. "Then my time in the class hasn't been wasted," he said happily and took the cold stone steps of Secorn Theological Seminary two at a time as he whistled, "Bring them in, Bring them in, Bring them in from the fields of sin."

Every day Dr. Rushworth came to class with new arguments. He branched over into other fields. He discovered the appalling fact that Father believed in Instantaneous Conversion, the Inspired Revelation of the Bible, and the Virgin Birth.

To make matters worse, Father used Scripture to prove his points.

This brought Dr. Rushworth to a point slightly south of hysteria. "Look here, my good man," he said sharply,

leaving his reading desk to stand in front of Father, "you can't use the *Bible* to prove that the *Bible* is true. It just isn't good logic."

Father looked mildly surprised. "Why not?" he asked simply. "Don't you believe the Bible is God's Word?"

"No! I mean, yes! That is, only in a way. Your whole concept and educational background is so — uh — foreign, Merriam, that I haven't time to go back and ground you in the fundamentals of modern thinking. I'm afraid it is impossible for us to find common ground. Perhaps you'd be happier in some other class."

Father thought this over wistfully. He shook his head sadly. "No, I believe this class is required for a master's degree," he said resignedly.

Dr. Rushworth, at least by his own exacting standards, had finished the semester a failure. He didn't even repeat the raised-hand test at the close of the term.

But though Father had made a grade of 97 in the final examination, handed in voluminous term papers and done all the required reading, Dr. Rushworth gave him only a C in the course.

Father felt rather bitter about that. However, he made no protest. Neither did he register for the second semester at Secorn, and he never did get his master's degree.

Several years later, however, he was still regularly remembering Dr. A. A. Rushworth in his prayers, a gesture which would undoubtedly have irritated the gentleman past all bearing, if he'd known about it.

## Chapter Fifteen

*“ . . . And cast a wishful eye . . . ”*

NO ONE UNDERSTOOD ME. NO ONE.

Here I was, sixteen — almost grown — and in love, and all my family could do was make silly jokes and laugh. My father talked about puppy love. My mother answered the telephone and called, clearly, “Hannah! It’s your Great Lover.” And hateful, impossible, horrid Carter and Jonnie, every time Lancy came to the house, whistled softly, “I can’t give you anything but Love, Baby.”

*Lancy Greeley.* I said the name over to myself a hundred times a day. I stood staring soulfully at his picture on my dresser, studying the thick-lashed, sulky blue eyes, the curly golden-blond hair, the wonderful, cynical expression of his mouth. I was sure I’d never feel the same again in my life about anyone. Fortunately I never have. My love was vast, sweeping, monumental and uncritical.

If anyone in the family pointed out that Lancy was still loafing his bored way through high school or that he never spent a nickel on my entertainment, I went into

a furious, hysterical rage of insulted pride and possessiveness.

Lancy was the most romantic thing that had ever happened to me. When we came to Denver, I spotted him at once, sitting in church beside Marjorie Wagner, a pretty, popular girl about my age. Marjorie and Lancy, I learned, were inseparable, and I sighed a little, looking at those glittering blond waves, those curling lashes, that dashing polka dot bow tie, saw Marjorie — and looked elsewhere.

The night Father visited the Southside True Believer church, I went along very unwillingly. For one thing I felt we had enough revival meetings at our own church without visiting others, and in addition, I was applying for a page job at the big downtown public library the next day.

I told Father that I wanted to stay home and put my hair up in curlers in preparation for my onslaught on the terrifying business world.

"Your hair looks all right the way it is," he said, which was an extravagant compliment from him. "And besides, I want you to play the accompaniment for a special song I promised Brother Gosden I'd furnish."

I sighed a little and went to get my coat. I supposed he meant that he was singing the special song himself. Although his voice was rather harsh and unmelodious, Father loved to sing. He had even taken a few voice lessons once and had always dreamed of having family

quartets or trios until our general lack of interest and aptitude forced him regretfully to abandon the hope. My piano playing was, I felt, on the same level as his singing. Nevertheless, I had a small core of exhibitionism that was gratified by walking up to a strange church platform in front of Father while the presiding minister announced that "Rev. Merriam and his daughter Hannah are providing us with the special music tonight." I enjoyed the focus of limelight on me for the brief moment during which I settled myself on the piano bench, adjusted the hymnal in the rack and played a dashing, if inaccurate, introductory measure.

Tonight, however, after we had run the gantlet of handshaking in the vestibule and found seats up near the front, Father said laconically, "I forgot to tell you. The boys told me they're singing 'The Old Rugged Cross.'"

I looked at him, aghast. "What boys?"

"The Greeley boys. They're here already." He nodded his head toward the far side of the church, and I stared, following his gesture, at the two familiar, frightening figures, one short and dark, the other tall and blond.

"Oh, no!" I said in a screaming whisper. It was just like Father to give me no warning! "I can't! Why didn't you tell me!" I'd never accompanied anyone else before — and now this! Lancy!

Father didn't have a chance to answer. Brother Gosden leaned over from the pulpit and roared, "Now, Brother

Merriam, you can't hide out on me like that! Come right here and sit on the platform with me!"

Father excused himself and strode off, leaving me to my panic. We were well into the second hymn before I regained my bearings. I tried to remember what Father had said. Wasn't it "The Old Rugged Cross" they were going to sing? I could play that. Somehow I'd get through. I stole a glance across the church and saw that both boys were leaning forward staring impatiently at me. I blinked and smiled tremulously back at them. They seemed to be forming soundless words — a question — but I couldn't make out what the message was.

I shook my head, baffled and pink, and went into another wave of panic. *Maybe they had decided to change songs at the last minute. Maybe they were going to sing something in five sharps.* I waited numbly, sure that the service was going by faster than any I'd ever been in before. The announcements were impossibly brief, the prayer a minute long.

"Brother Merriam has provided us with a treat tonight," the minister announced, almost at once. "We've all heard the Greeley boys sing and play at camp meeting and assemblies, and tonight they've brought their guitars and are going to sing that beloved hymn, 'The Old Rugged Cross.' Brother Merriam's daughter Hannah will accompany them at the piano."

I was at the piano. The two of them went into a brief

huddle beside me, then Paul bent to say briefly, "Transpose one step lower, will you?"

Transpose! I couldn't. I turned white, turned red, and lost my place in the book. Lancy, his guitar slung over his shoulder, bent with courtly grace to find the right page for me. I whispered in a frantic, hoarse mumble, "I don't know how to transpose."

He flashed me a quick, surprised look out of the corner of his eye. "Okay," he whispered back. "Just play it."

My fingers were shaking so that I could hardly hit the keys, and I made two discords during the introduction, but when the boys started singing I found myself calming down and even listening. They had transposed for me, I realized, and the knowledge of this astonishing chivalry touched me to the quick. "Why, they're good!" I realized, hearing the sweet-mournful voices, the crooning twang of the guitars. Evidently the audience agreed with me.

"Give us another one, boys," someone called out, as soon as they'd finished. "How about 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot'?"

Lancy came over and found the page for me. This time my fingers were surer on the chords. I finished triumphantly with a fine, rippling crescendo and went back to my place so drowsy with relief that I hardly heard a word of the sermon, even though it was full of deathbed stories and ended with a portentous, tolling altar call.

I had just reached the vestibule when I felt fingers on

my arm and looked up into Lancy's wryly handsome face. "Would you ride home with us?" he asked, and I saw beyond him that Paul had Lila Ann McKay in tow, steering her and his bulky guitar case with swift decision toward the outside door.

I didn't ask Father for once; I told him. He was talking with the evangelist when I bore down on him. He opened his mouth with a decidedly negative look in his eye, but before he had a chance to deliver his decision I was out of earshot.

The coupé was small. Paul drove and Lila Ann sat in the middle. I sat on Lancy's lap, with my knees practically against the windshield and my head bumping the low top at three-second intervals. It was bliss. It was heaven. I stole a quick glance at his bitterly handsome profile and my heart bumped, too. Only one small thought in the back of my mind kept the evening from being altogether perfect — *what about Marjorie?*

At my door, greatly daring, I asked, "Would you care to come in?" My eyes ranged politely over all three faces, but my question was focussed desperately on only one.

"We'll go on," Paul said promptly, and I loved him.

Lancy came in. We sat stiffly, side by side on the living room couch. Mother came in, saw us, gave me a surprised, twinkling glance, and went back into the kitchen. Grandma came out of her bedroom, looking, with her hair in a net for the night, like a chipmunk popping up out of its burrow. She turned around and scuttled back



in. Carter strolled in, saw Lancy with a great, welcoming air of discovery and dropped into an armchair to talk basketball.

"Carter!" Mother called from the kitchen. "It's time for you to go to bed."

"What?" said Carter incredulously. Then, with dawning intelligence, looking at my furious, exasperated face, "Ohhhh! I get it."

I could have killed him. But when he was gone, I wished he were back again because I couldn't think of anything to say.

"You certainly sing beautifully," I said brightly and then realized, blushing, that I'd said that once before.

"You ought to learn to transpose so you could accompany us," Lancy said. Before I could stop my treacherous tongue I blurted out, "What about Marjorie?" Marjorie played beautifully.

Lancy's intense, Lord-Byron look of unhappy desperation deepened. He shook his golden head curtly. "That," he said with cavernous drama, "is all over. Forever."

*They had quarreled.* It was all right! A secret, unwilling suspicion that I was catching him on the rebound flickered through my mind and died. I didn't care.

"Some people," he said, staring sternly off into space, "are nothing but fickle, light-headed butterflies. Flirts, that's what they are. Always looking around for a new fellow."

I made a sympathetic, clucking sound and tried to look steady, mature and faithful to the death. Evidently I succeeded, because all at once Lancy seemed to make a manful recovery, picked up his guitar case and said, "Would you like me to sing something for you?"

"Oh, yes," I breathed in ecstasy and sat listening enraptured as he crooned his dulcet path through "In a Little Rosewood Casket," "The Baggage Coach Ahead" and "Springtime in the Rockies."

"Play 'Among My Souvenirs,'" I begged, breathing only occasionally.

Lancy shoved the guitar back in the case, flexed his chin and gave me a stern, stricken look. "Never ask me that," he said in a rough, grating voice. I shrank back into my corner of the couch, half frightened and half thrilled. Such raw, unplumbed emotion I'd never seen at close hand before.

The front door opened and Father came in, Bible in hand. He gave Lancy a puzzled, surprised look as if he'd never seen him before.

"Well!" he said. He took off his overcoat, put it over the back of a chair and stood with his back to the gas stove, his hands clasped behind him over the flame. Lancy and I sat in stunned silence.

"Good meeting tonight," Father said briskly. "You boys sang well."

"Thank you," Lancy said, and his voice sounded, all at once, young and uncertain. He picked up his guitar

case and held it across his knees, and his eyes strayed to the door.

"Yes," said Father, in a summarizing, farewell tone, "it was a good evening."

"Chris, is that you?" Mother called from the kitchen. There was something in her tone. Father went toward the kitchen and the couch creaked as our backs relaxed against it.

The wonderful evening seemed to have ended, but I tried desperately to prolong it. "D-do you like to ice skate?" I asked in a high, artificial, polite voice, the silence from the kitchen reaching toward me like a long arm.

"Yes," said Lancy, his voice as polite. "Yes, I do. Of course we can't skate here every year."

"Oh?" I asked, still in the strange, tight voice. "Why is that?"

"It doesn't get cold enough."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Yes. The ice doesn't get thick enough."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Yes."

"Oh."

We sat in silence.

"Hannah," Father said from the kitchen door. "It's ten-thirty. I think you'd better tell Lancy good<sup>1</sup> night and go to bed."

Lancy left — hurriedly.

Life had ended for me. An avalanche composed of equal parts of fury and grief descended on the kitchen. Lancy would never come back, I told Father. I knew it. I would live and die an old maid if Father had his way, I said. Nothing would ever be the same for me again. Nothing!

In a lull in the tempest Mother interjected quickly, "Your father just didn't realize you've grown up."

Father, for once, looked cowed. "If Lancy likes you, he'll come back," he promised in a hopeful, apologetic voice. I gave him a look straight out of Edgar Allan Poe and stalked tragically off to bed.

But with his trusty guitar over his shoulder, Lancy came back. He walked me to church every Sunday morning and walked me home. He walked me to evening service and back. He walked me to prayer meeting on Wednesday evening. On Saturday nights we walked clear across Denver to Baker's Mission where he and Paul sang duets for an audience made up of one fourth derelicts and three fourths derelict-rescuers. He walked me home, all three miles.

Mother's patience wore thin, along with the soles of my shoes.

"You're too young to spend all your time with one boy," she protested. "Don't you think that Clint Peterson is nice? He has a job and his own car. Or Leo McKay — he's going to be a doctor."

Clint? Leo? Who were they? Just people. Straight-

haired, smiling, unmusical, calm and phlegmatic. Lancy was Lancy. There was no one else like him. He was going to be a cowboy singer on the radio, someday, maybe have his own program, just like the Beverly Hill-billies. Lancy was so romantic, so somber, so serious, so intense. He wrote me reams of poetry. He sang to me, block after block, as he walked. He got his feelings hurt and sulked. Being with Lancy was just like living in a novel — the quarrels, the reconciliations, the long talks about Love and Life and Death. And he loved me. Deathlessly. I'd never been loved before. Oh, of course, my parents loved me, but that was different. Anyway, their love was divided among the six of us. Father's had to take in all the church members, too. Lancy loved me. Me alone. He said so, over and over, in twenty stanza poems and with guitar accompaniment.

I dreamed through my days. I dreamed at work at the library, where I put books on the wrong shelves or ran my book truck into the stacks with building-shaking reverberations. I dreamed at home, scorching the ironing, dropping dishes, running into doors.

Father finally put his foot down. He summoned me to his study and motioned me to a chair opposite him, where I sat rocking languidly, a far-off, ethereal light in my eyes.

"Hannah," he said loudly, as if he were addressing a deaf person, "I think you're spending too much time with Lancy. It's got to stop."

I came out of my trance and gave him a wide-eyed look of anguish. "It's too late," I said dramatically.

Father paled slightly. "What do you mean?" he asked, half out of his chair.

I straightened proudly. "It's a secret, but Lancy and I are engaged." Father laughed shortly. "No, you aren't," he said. "That's ridiculous. You couldn't marry Lancy, even if you were old enough. What would you live on?"

Adults had such funny minds, I thought, baffled. "We aren't going to get married right away!" I shrilled in exasperation. "We're just engaged!"

I braced myself determinedly for civil war, but none materialized. Father and Mother evidently held a parley and decided to let things stand, for the present. They held their peace grimly while I carried on long murmuring conversations over the telephone, received daily notes on West High School theme paper, delivered by the cynical but obliging Carter, and continued to walk miles and miles of Denver's sidewalks beside the guitar-laden Lancy. I came home from one of these Saturday night walks to Baker's Mission with soaked feet and chattering teeth.

"You had some money, didn't you?" Mother asked me, in exasperation, as soon as Lancy had left. "Why didn't you suggest taking the streetcar when it started to rain?"

"I didn't notice it was raining," I said, shivering inside my bathrobe and gulping down hot lemonade.

I had to stay home from church all the next day.

Lancy didn't come over Monday. When Carter came home from school, he shook his head when I reached for my daily note. "I — didn't see Lancy today," he said and edged for the door.

I reached for another Kleenex and comforted myself dolefully that at least Lancy wouldn't see me with streaming eyes and red nose. And, after all, we *were* engaged.

By Wednesday night Mother reluctantly agreed that I was well enough to go to prayer meeting and made no objection when I put on the new powder blue crepe that my first library pay check had bought.

I picked a seat toward the rear, on the aisle, and put a hymnbook in the space beside me to hold it for Lancy. I kept casting nervous glances toward the door, but there was no sight of those glittering blond waves above the heads of the incoming worshipers.

Just as Father announced the first hymn, "Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead Us," I cast one more glance backwards. I took one long, long look and then turned around and stared fixedly at the hymnal.

*Lancy had brought Marjorie to prayer meeting! And I had turned around just in time to catch her eye, in time to see her glance at the vacant seat beside me.*

Miserable and sore-hearted I knelt for the long prayer session with my hot cheek against the cool wood of the pew, hardly knowing what I was doing. Father always prayed the last prayer and when his voice, calm, sure and

steadfast mounted above the whispered, murmuring prayers through the building, wretched, stinging tears welled up in my eyes.

"Among the sorrows of this world, Lord, You stand at our side," Father prayed. "This world is a vale of tears, but You are our comforter."

All at once it seemed to me as if I had had nothing but unhappiness and sorrow, being a True Believer.

I knelt there and remembered the circle of faces around me on the Arizona playground, and the time I'd walked down the long, long aisle of the Los Arboles High School auditorium, the street meeting at First and Main in Los Arboles.

"'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,'" Father prayed, borrowing some of God's own words with which to address Him.

If that were true, I thought with aching bitterness, God must love me. Marjorie had other boy friends. Surely, surely she couldn't feel about Lancy as I did. He was all I wanted, all I'd ever want of life.

I rose, mechanically, with the others at the end of Father's prayer. I always enjoyed prayer meeting better than any of the other services. There was something homely and intimate and quiet about prayer meeting. The service was held downstairs in the Sunday School auditorium, and the people who came were the best in the church, the steady, warm-hearted people who were faithful and sincere and eager-spirited. Father often



pounded the pulpit and shouted sternly during his upstairs services, but at prayer meeting he talked in a quiet, conversational voice that seemed to say, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If you came to prayer meeting tense and jangling inside, you listened to Father's steady voice and presently you breathed a deep sigh and found yourself relaxing, like a fist uncurling.

But tonight, even Father's healing words couldn't assuage the hurt inside me. I kept my face on him and my head high but my mind was on the seat across the aisle behind me. Once I thought I heard Marjorie's muffled whisper and a wave of scarlet swept up from the collar of my new blue dress.

I stood in my place as long as I dared after the benediction, and when I turned around they were gone. I moved with the cluster of people in the doorway up the basement stairway to the sidewalk, to the fresh night air.

I walked slowly on down the block to our car and stood beside it, waiting for — Father.

## Chapter Sixteen

*"From Greenland's icy mountains . . ."*

LIFE STRETCHED OUT UNUTTERABLY BLEAK AND barren ahead of me — without Lancy. I was sure I was going to live and die an unloved, unwanted spinster. There was only one course open for me, I thought with sad renunciation. *I would be a missionary!*

Missionaries had always had a special, magnetic charm for our whole family. To us, the Grigman family who traveled alone twenty years before into the African veldt were more interesting than Swiss Family Robinson. A visit from spare, balding Dr. Whitney from China was as exciting to us as meeting Roy Chapman Andrews or Martin and Osa Johnson.

Father himself had once dreamed of being a missionary and had submitted his application for a post in South America, but by the time his plea was considered by the General Board, he had passed the maximum age limit for outgoing workers.

In Arizona he'd had a certain amount of opportunity to satisfy his craving for mission work. Half the state,

when we arrived there, had seemed to be made up of Indian reservations. The Yumas, the Pimas, the Navajos, the Coconinos, the Havasupais and the Hopis — the names rolled savoringly on the tongue.

Perhaps it was Molly, a massive mound of mahogany Yuma squaw, who finally convinced Father that he'd better be a minister instead of a missionary.

Molly evidently lacked the traditional Indian stolidity, for when Father and Brother Ray, out on a missionary trip, drove into the circle of mud-and-tin shacks on the bank of the Colorado River, she landed on the running board with a flying leap that almost overturned the car.

"Bring dress?" she asked coyly, putting her square, beaming face into the car.

Father pointed over his shoulder. The back seat was full of clothing.

"Yes," he said, "I think there's enough here for the whole village."

Molly was in the back seat almost before he had stopped the car. She began trying on everything, over her ragged, dirty calico dress, but each dress, sweater or blouse was too small and she'd throw it angrily on the floor.

Father and Brother Ray were baffled. They had intended to call the Indians together, have a brief song-and-worship service and then present the clothing to the official head of the village, a white man who, with his Indian wife, ran a sort of trading post and store near by.

Molly seemed to have taken matters in her own hands, however. She paid no attention to the two white men who stood beside the car, watching her and trying to decide what to do.

"Look here, uh — Mrs. — Sister," Father said finally. "Those clothes are for everyone. All. Not just you. Understand?"

Molly turned and gave him a wide, happy smile. She had found something that fitted her, a man's Prince Albert coat. By holding her breath she managed to fasten its straining buttons around the cascading mounds of her enormous figure. She added a black derby and stepped out, head high, her walk the stately sidle of a fashion-show model.

She started on past them but stopped all of a sudden and pointed at the camera hanging around Brother Ray's neck.

"Take picture," she said majestically.

Father laughed. "That's a good idea," he said. "Mary would like a picture of her, I'm sure."

Brother Ray aimed his camera but Molly had other ideas. "You, too!" she ordered imperatively, beckoning to Father.

He backed away in haste. "Oh, now," he said placatingly. "Just you. Just lady. Not me."

Molly marched in his direction, coattails flapping, derby bouncing.

"Yes," she said simply. She stood ramrod straight,

grim-faced, as close to Father's side as she could get and Brother Ray obliged quickly.

Mother did indeed like the picture, and, to Father's intense annoyance she produced it for each new visitor at the parsonage for years thereafter.

Ordinarily, anyway, Father's missionary enthusiasm was directed overseas. Since he couldn't be a foreign missionary, he hoped one of us would get the Call.

He did what he could to prepare fertile beds for the seed to fall in. On birthdays and Christmas, we were always likely to find among our presents one missionary biography, and the one card game we were allowed to play was entitled, of course, *The Missionary Game*. It was similar to *Authors*; we traded Cape Verde Islands missionaries for African, South American for Japanese.

I'd often had a secret idea that I'd like to be a missionary, but I was too cautious to put myself on record, for Father had a notably persistent way of holding you to a thing like that.

Confessedly, the features of missionary life that appealed to me were not quite the same as those that Father liked. Father thought he'd like to go to Africa. China or India were my choices. In China the missionaries had servants and never washed their own dishes or made their own beds; that appealed to me tremendously. And from both India and China the workers returned with tinkling brass temple bells, carved teakwood ele-

phants and lengths of fabulously beautiful silks — Chinese brocades and filmy saris.

It was Sister Gladys March and the week-long missionary meeting in Denver that finally turned me against foreign missions as a career. I was thrilled when I heard that she was to share my room for the week, and, as I emptied bureau drawers and coat hangers, I daydreamed long nocturnal conversations — the Taj Mahal, curry, temple incense, child brides, sacred cows!

"Your daughter," I could hear the coming visitor saying at the breakfast table, "has a natural bent for missionary work. *India needs her!*"

And I could imagine Lancy wistfully reading about my missionary exploits and sighing dolefully in hopeless realization of his loss.

My splendid picture dimmed a little when I first saw my new roommate. She was a tall, big-boned spinster with pale blue eyes swimmingly magnified by thick-lensed glasses. Mother wasn't tiny, but as she ushered the visitor into my bedroom, she was dwarfed beside the broad-shouldered woman.

"Show Sister March where to hang her clothes," Mother told me, and I hurried over to open the closet door, proud of the six empty beribboned hangers waiting for her.

Sister March looked me over disparagingly. "Will she sleep with me?" she asked in unenthusiastic tones.

"Well, yes," said Mother apologetically. "We don't

have a guest room. I'm afraid . . ." Her voice trailed off vaguely as she and I watched Sister March with horrified interest. The big woman with a deft, one-fingered gesture had taken out her teeth and was replacing them with another set she unrolled from a handkerchief in her pocket.

"New," she said briefly and wagged her jaw back and forth a few times in an experimental sort of way. She sighed relievedly and looked at me with a little less aversion. "Quite all right, I suppose," she said. "I am a light sleeper, though, and you'll have to lie quietly, girlie."

For the rest of the week, I was Girlie. Ordinarily Carter and Jonnie would have pounced on a name like that and used it from then on unmercifully, but for once they sympathized with me.

Sister March was very hard to please. She found our household extremely noisy, particularly the boys, and she mentioned this fact often. Colorado in springtime seemed extremely chilly to her, and she went around closing windows and turning on radiators continually.

Our meals, also, were unsatisfactory to Sister March.

Mother had got up early the first morning and spent extra time on breakfast. Eggs were expensive, but she'd made scrambled eggs and bacon, baked biscuits, opened homemade marmalade.

Sister March came to the table with a shawl around her shoulders and an expression of distaste on her face. She looked carefully through the thick glasses, up and

down the table, and then at Mother. She shook her gray-ing head firmly.

"No roughage?" she said sharply. "I always have bran for breakfast."

Mother hurried out and came back with a heaped-up cereal bowl. She passed Sister March the milk pitcher. The missionary felt it gingerly.

"Cold," she pronounced. "I always have warm milk."

Mother trotted out to the kitchen again.

Sister March called after her. "Don't you have any prunes?" she asked. "I always eat prunes for breakfast. And could I have a cup of tea?"

Mother really didn't mind any of this; Sister March's meals, once she'd explained what she wanted, were easy to get. But what did put a dangerous glow in Mother's brown eyes was the sight, at the first of every meal, of her guest carefully and slowly wiping each piece of silver on her napkin.

The missionary convention itself was a rousing affair. Hearing the stories of self-sacrifice and heroism, singing "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," fingering the curios lined up along the tables in the church lobby, I still might have heard the Call in my always-susceptible ears except for one thing. I was sleeping each night in the same bed with Sister March — and well on my way to becoming the town's youngest insomniac.

Sleep, I had learned at once, was to Sister March a precious thing. She prepared for it extensively. First she



undressed modestly in the closet, emerging in a long striped outing flannel gown, lavender bedsocks, and an old-fashioned muslin nightcap. While I huddled on the far side of the bed, watching, she pulled out whichever set of teeth she was then wearing, and standing in the middle of the room with her eyes fixed firmly on infinity began doing deep-breathing exercises. She inhaled so violently that her nostrils nearly flattened shut, and exhaled until the window curtains fluttered.

She ignored my presence loftily. After the breathing exercises she read a chapter in the Bible, the mildewed old book held within a few inches of her glasses, and then dropped with a heavy thump to her knees. She had developed a compromise between silent and public prayer and made her devotions in a loud mutter, out of which I occasionally garnered a single word or phrase.

“mumble mumble mumble MUMBLE mumble

“mumble mumble mumble MUMBLE mumble,” she prayed rhythmically.

“mumble India mumble MUMBLE Calcutta.”

Then she'd rise from her knees, carefully remove her heavy glasses, flip off the light and grope for the bed, while I clung as distantly as possible to the far margin.

It was only then that she spoke. However, Sister March did not mention the Taj Mahal or curry.

“Please don't twist or turn or wiggle,” she said politely into the darkness. “I am tired and I must have my rest. Good night, girlie.”

“Good night,” I squeaked and lay, fighting sleep, my arms and legs cramped and prickling, dying to turn over but too afraid of Sister March to move an inch.

Several years later another visiting missionary told in church service of Gladys March’s extraordinary single-mindedness and devotion to duty. “The rest of us often found her strange and difficult,” he said, “but none of us could equal her in zeal for the work.”

But for me, he was too late. I was lost to the foreign mission field forever

## *Chapter Seventeen*

*"Tell me the Old, Old Story . . ."*

BROTHER MACK BEEKMAN, THE EVANGELIST for our spring revival meeting, leaned so far back in his chair that the legs creaked dangerously. His thumbs were hooked in his vest armholes and his sandy hair stood up at the back of his head where he'd run his big freckled hands across it. He was in a relaxed, social mood; the Friday evening service was over and there would be no meeting Saturday evening. We were having cake and coffee in the parsonage dining room but the coffee was growing cold while we listened to Brother Beekman.

"Ever tell you, Merriam," he asked Father solemnly, but with a twinkling side glance at the rest of us, "about the time George Nelson nearly got imprisoned along with Paul and Silas?"

Father loved a good story. No raconteur himself, he was a wonderful listener, and his lips now were twitching in amused anticipation.

"No," he said laconically. "Don't believe you did."

"Well," Brother Mack said, bringing his chair legs

back to the floor and putting his elbows on the table, "I just saw Brother George at Kansas City when I come through there last week. He was still pretty shook up by what happened. Seems he was holding a meeting down Charleston way, little church out in the country, and he was tellin' a story about Paul and Silas bein' thrown in jail. He wanted to illustrate it real graphiclike, so he put his feet and hands through the altar railing, just as if he was in stocks, too, along with the two apostles. Sat down on the edge of the platform to do it, and kept right on preaching. Well, pretty soon, he got through with the story, and —"

Brother Beekman stopped to take a maddeningly long sip of coffee.

"What —" Carter started, but Father silenced him with an admonitory glance.

"— he started to get up. George could get his hands out all right but his feet were stuck fast. Couldn't budge them. He wiggled them one way and then he wiggled them the other but he was caught. Finally he had to stop and say, 'Pardon me, folks,' sit down and take off his shoes before he could get free. Said it ruined the whole meeting for him."

As I laughed with the rest of the family, I thought appreciatively that this was one of the advantages of living at Denver.

Denver, population 350,000, the Mile-High City, the Gateway to the Rockies, the capital of Colorado, had

another outstanding attribute, as far as I was concerned; it was the crossroads between the East and West and the Rome of the revivalists.

It seemed sometimes as if every evangelist on his way to the Middle West and every traveling singer on his way to Southern California stopped off in Denver, if only long enough to telephone Father from Union Station to report the success — inevitably glowing — he'd had at his last meeting in Kankakee or San Luis Obispo.

Much as I dreaded revival meetings, I'd have to admit, I reflected, as I watched Brother Beekman cut himself another piece of cake and prepare to launch into another story, that evangelists were a fascinating, wonderful crew, and that life without them would be, if less harrowing, certainly much, much duller.

Sitting there with my elbows on the dining room table and my chin cupped in my palms, I thought back over all the evangelists I'd known, clear back to the Kalstons. I remembered the Joy Party, who'd traveled in a home-made house car, the grandpappy of all house trailers. I remembered the Purdys, who'd played on at least ten different musical instruments, some of which were peculiar only to the Purdys — the mandoharp, for instance, and the trombolin. I recalled the affectionate evangelist who'd called his wife from the back seat to give her a resounding kiss beside the pulpit, as a practical demonstration of some point in his message.

I thought of the exhorter who'd had the lights turned

out to increase the effectiveness of his sermon on death, and then ruined his whole carefully built atmosphere by having to call in help to find the light switch.

I remembered all the women evangelists: Sister Mamie Robbins, who always wore a white, man-style shirt and a black necktie; Sister Helen Brinson, who wore her clothing long, dark and demure as became a True Believer. Perhaps it was only accidental that the sober silk clung so lovingly to breast and thigh or that the Sister's gestures had such a feline, sinuous quality.

I'd never forget the Noble Party: Rose, who wore pink; Angela, who wore white; Pansy, who wore purple, and their brother James, who wore navy blue and carried the violins. Rose played the violin and sang — a neat trick — while Angela, wearing rubber gloves and an exalted expression, drew pictures on a lighted easel with colored chalk. The Noble Party always decorated the church where they were appearing with their old vaudeville posters.

Once in Los Arboles we'd heard Monk Wiggins, the ex-pugilist, who'd taken off, first, his coat, then his vest, and finally his tie, until the uneasy audience began to wonder if he would finally appear, like our returned missionaries, in native costume.

And, for the world, I wouldn't have missed any of the topflight evangelists and their enthralling, amazing stories. No one, I thought, as I listened to Brother Beekman, could tell a story as well as an evangelist. I was

sure, although I had never attended a vaudeville performance, that Mack Beekman, if he should ever fall from grace, could get a job telling stories on the Orpheum Circuit any time.

Of course, since we often had the same evangelist back for frequent repeat visits, and since we visited revival services at other churches, I'd heard some of the stories so often I could repeat them word for word myself.

Every time I'd heard Robert Ralph Beardsley, for instance, he'd told the same story. Brother Beardsley, a member of the florid, Old-Southern school of evangelism, cultivated the flowing pompadour, the white necktie, the rosebud boutonniere and the single tear, to be wiped carefully away with a flourish of a snowy handkerchief. His perennial story always called for the handkerchief at the climax and was sure-fire to set the old ladies in the front pews weeping in sympathetic rows.

"There was once a loving young father, a fine upstanding young man," Brother Beardsley would boom in his polished-mahogany baritone, "who had two little daughters, only a year apart."

(This we could easily believe; True Believers took to heart the Scripture "Be fruitful and multiply," and some of the phenomenal growth of the denomination could most certainly be traced to that fact.)

"The older child," said Robert Ralph, "was a delightful, sunny-haired girl with merry voice and a sweet, childish prattle. But the baby daughter" — and his voice

fell to a note of pure, wrung sorrow — “was not quite — *right*. She had been dropped from her cradle when a mere infant, and she had never developed as her sister had. But her parents loved her just as much as the older girl. The little mother dressed the two girls alike and curled the baby’s hair with the same loving care she expended on the other child. And each night, when the father came home from work, the two little daughters came running to meet him.

“One night the older girl decided to pick her father a bouquet of flowers. She went flitting about the garden, gathering a posy here, a daisy there, until her arms were laden with the lovely blossoms. But the poor little, ah, unfortunate, in trying to imitate her sister, picked up a twig — a straw — a dandelion, and a handful of weeds and held them, crooked, wilting and broken in her hot little hand.”

Sobs were already breaking out along the front pews. Brother Beardsley’s voice softened to a rich, resonant tremolo.

“Then the two little girls went running to meet their father. The older child thrust her beautiful bouquet into her daddy’s hands, and he threw his arms around her and kissed her. Then the other little one came toddling to her father, holding up her wilted weeds and sticks. The father’s strong young face was sad; he turned his head to hide a tear. But then he put down the other child and gathered up the little unfortunate one, weeds,



sticks, dandelions and all, and enfolded her tight against his father-heart."

With a flourish of his handkerchief at the corner of his eye, Brother Beardsley always finished with all stops out. "And the father loved her poor offering the best of all!" From there he always launched into a parallel that was sure to cheer up the dimmer mentalities in the congregation.

Another story, for some reason, seemed to be a favorite of nearly every evangelist we heard, I thought, although I didn't believe Brother Beekman had used it yet in the current meeting. That was the story which Carter had once dubbed "The Chilblained Eagle." We three older kids were so familiar with the tale by now that Carter and Jonnie, as one man, always turned to look across the church at me the minute the current speaker began: "I am reminded of the story of an eagle . . ."

The eagle, according to the Standard Version, was flying high above Niagara when it saw the carcass of a rabbit floating on a cake of ice toward the falls. The hungry eagle swooped down and began devouring the rabbit, all the while floating faster and faster down the swift river toward the falls.

As the last evangelist had described it: "Every few seconds the bird's head would lift. He'd peer ahead, but then he'd think, 'Oh, I have plenty of time, plenty of time!' and he'd go back to his temporal feast, forgetting the awful death and destruction lurking just ahead of

him. Finally the terrible roar of the falls was upon him. He beat his mighty wings." (The preacher flapped his.) "He tried to rise." (Neither the speaker nor the eagle could move an inch.) "But all to no avail. *The eagle's feet were frozen to the ice under him!* And with a terrible scream, he went over the falls, to the watery death that awaited him."

It was an effective story, and the Chilblained Eagle came back to our church with nearly every visiting evangelist.

The stories the evangelists told at church, however, couldn't hold a candle to the ones they recounted over cake and coffee in the parsonage dining room after service, I decided, as Brother Beekman launched into another experience, his chair tilting backward again, his big hand ruffling his hair.

"The old couple, Brother and Sister Jennison, where I stayed last meeting, down in West Virginia, had an old maid daughter named Emma," he said. "Emma looked as if she'd been brought up on straight vinegar. Every time you'd mention a man she'd sniff. Couldn't abide the creatures, she always said. One night at supper table, she was braggin' to me that she was forty-one years old and no fool man had ever kissed her."

Brother Beekman's face grew preternaturally solemn and he looked so woebegone at Mother that she giggled.

"Wasn't that just a crime and a shame?" he asked sorrowfully. "Anyway, I just leaned right across the table,

and in front of her own father and mother, I did it. I *kissed the lady myself!*"

We roared, chiefly at his puckery shudder and grimace.

"What did Emma do then?" Mother asked, her eyes wet from laughing.

Brother Beekman sighed and folded his napkin. "Emma got me fair and square," he said. "She drew herself up and gave me a cold, grim eye and she said, 'Well, I've always said I've never been kissed by a man yet, and by all that's holy, I can *still* say it!'"

## Chapter Eighteen

*“ . . . Thy tents shall be our home ”*

### CAMP MEETING!

Carter and I stood in the door of the cookhouse, next to the big screened cafeteria tent, and looked across the tree-shaded park toward the enormous white mountain of looping canvas that was the main tabernacle of the Colorado True Believer Annual Camp Meeting.

It was a relaxed, easy time of day, following the afternoon preaching service but too early yet for us to put on our white duck aprons and take our places behind the long steam table in the cafeteria. Carter had made us each a big beef sandwich, stepping carefully inside the walk-in refrigerator to get away from the persistent flies, and now, sandwiches in hand, we loafed in the doorway in the late afternoon sunshine, enjoying the new companionship that had sprung up between us that summer. Carter had suddenly changed from an annoying small brother to a good-looking young man, a head taller than I. He had a car of his own and a succession of girls. His delightful, raucous sense of humor usually kept me

giggling, but now we were both in a quiet, relaxed mood brought on by the day's hard work and the soft, mellow quality of the dappled light and shade around us.

"This reminds me of another camp meeting a long time ago," Cart said in a slow, searching voice. "I don't know just when it was, but I think we went to another one out in the country like this. In Arizona, maybe."

My memory was two years better than his. "That was in Nebraska," I told him. "It was a lot like this. We didn't have camp meeting in Arizona, and of course the ones in California were too — too citified."

Out in California the annual camp meeting had been held on the Kelsey College campus. The preaching services had been conducted in a big tent pitched on the tennis court and those attending slept in the school dormitories and ate in the dining hall. It just wasn't the same thing at all.

"In a way," Carter said judiciously, chasing the flies away from his sandwich with an annoyed wave of his arm. "It's a shame that camp meetings are dying out, don't you think? A reporter was out here this morning from the *Denver Post* taking pictures, just like this was a circus or something."

I nodded, looking fondly down the long rows of little tents stretched neatly in every direction. With abrupt clarity I was remembering that first camp meeting back in Nebraska.

We'd driven all day in Father's first Ford to cover the

ninety miles between Coreton and Wheyton Park, stopping often to open and shut farm gates or to patch the tires. Rolling into the campground late that evening had been just like sweeping through the Pearly Gates. Just as now, there had been the sound of singing in the distance, and there had been white-haired Brother Henshaw, like a chubby Saint Peter, at the entrance to welcome us and direct us to our camping spot. Above the little tent roofs, rosy in the afterglow, the big tabernacle had looked like the Great White Throne itself, waiting for the sounds of prayer and praise and repentance of the opening service.

Carter and Jonnie and I tumbled out like puppies and ran in excited circles through the grounds, tripping over tent ropes and eying strange children with offhand interest, trying to absorb as much of the excitement of camp meeting as possible before Father got the two tents and the cots up and we had to go to bed. Even going to bed hadn't been too bad, with the unfamiliar sagging canvas roof overhead patterned with branch shadows. We went to sleep to the sound of distant singing from the tabernacle:

There is power, power, wonder-working power  
In the blood — of the Lamb!

We had gone to children's service in a tent that was a smaller replica of the big tabernacle, and Sister Harrold, her eyeglasses twinkling and her blond pompadour bob-

bing, had led us in singing, "Jesus Loves Me" and then given an object lesson featuring two glasses of water, a bottle of ink and two big cardboard hearts, one white and one black.

I could see her still, as she poured ink, drop by drop, into the clean water, and hear her saying with slow impressiveness, "That was just *one little lie*."

As if he were following my thoughts, Carter asked, "Do you remember something about a gopher?"

"A gopher?"

Yes. Yes, I did. Wonderful as camp meeting was, it ended that year in disgrace and dishonor for me — and all on account of a gopher. I'd been crossing the campground on the way back from the "comfort station," hurrying to get away from the pervading smell of disinfectant, when I saw Linda Wittmer, one of the Workers' children, half-running, half-stumbling ahead of me, carrying a slopping bucket of water.

"Hey, what you doing?" I caught up with her, my curiosity overcoming my awe at her exalted social position as daughter of The Evangelist.

Her brown eyes were excited. "We're drowning a gopher! Come on!" The bucket splashed still more as she ran.

I was pressed into service in the bucket brigade. Bill Wittmer, Linda's brother, was directing operations, his blond hair in his eyes, his voice hoarse from yelling.

The gopher had a home near the banks of the stream.

He was an enterprising gopher with tunnels in every direction. He was sassy, too, and no sooner did we thoroughly flood one hole than he'd pop up flauntingly twenty feet away, give us a jeering look and disappear with a rude flip of his rump. I carried buckets until my hands were blistered and my dress front sopping.

But all at once, Father had appeared. He didn't say a word; he gave me a terrible, all-inclusive survey and marched me off to our tents.

I'd done something wrong, I knew, but I wasn't sure just what it was. Trying to dodge the inevitable punishment approaching, I sobbed wildly. "Daddy, Daddy, I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I won't ever drown a gopher again!"

But Father had nothing against drowning gophers, it seemed — *on weekdays*. This was Sunday.

"Don't you remember learning the Ten Commandments just last month in Sunday School?" he asked me, a tired, exasperated note in his voice.

"Yes-es," I said doubtfully, racking my brain to recall that mysterious *Gopher Commandment*!

"Yes," I repeated to Carter now, "I remember that gopher very well!"

We grinned at each other and lapsed into warm, reminiscent silence. The light was fading a little and there was a sudden accession of activity all over the campground. A woman near by called a little boy and girl in from the swings and began to scrub their faces and hands, dipping her washcloth in a bucket in a tent door.



Three older women, their faces red from crying, emerged from the prayer tent and crossed toward the bookstore tent. A light pickup came bouncing along the makeshift road to camp, a big sack of chlorinated lime in the back of the truck. It was Brother Hoolick's truck, but Father was driving. He raised a hand in casual salute to us and drove on toward the rest rooms discreetly hidden in the trees beyond.

"Father does everything," Carter observed with mingled pride and annoyance. "Brother Hoolick's supposed to keep up the grounds, but most of the time Father's out here working."

Father was in charge of the camp. He presided at the opening services; he had arranged accommodations for the staff of evangelistic workers; he also checked supplies and listened to complaints and tried to keep the flies and mosquitoes down.

"We'd better get ready to face the hungry horde," Carter said, straightening and reaching for his apron. "Here comes the chef. I want to get through early so I can drive in to Denver after Greta. Save us a couple of seats, will you? Or are you going to sing in the choir?"

"No, I'll be here on this side." I pointed to the empty tabernacle. The choir loft was a refuge I'd sought the first night when I'd heard that Pallett was to be the main camp-meeting speaker. I was fairly sure of my state of grace, but I could still remember the terrifying battery of the little man's husky, whispering voice against my

consciousness, back in Los Arboles. In the choir one was safe from that repeated, insistent, "Are you SURE? Are you SURE? If God called for your soul tonight — are you SURE?" Since the choir stood to sing the invitation hymns at the close of the sermon, its members were exempt from that searching test, "Stand up if you're a Christian — but remember, DON'T LIE TO GOD!"

Tonight, however, after hearing the evangelist's first message, I felt free to sit in the audience. True, I had been moved, frightened, uneasy, during his message. His stories had been as gripping as ever. He had told about a young girl who had sinned against God until her heart was like stone. God could no longer speak to her at all, and she knew it. She was on her deathbed, the evangelist said, and she asked to have her coffin brought in so that she might perhaps have some stirring of emotion, some feeling. But no, when her coffin was placed beside her, she still was as cold and unmoved as ever. "Put me in the coffin, then," she directed, and her relatives obliged. But still the young woman was as stony and tearless as ever and died without a single flicker of emotion.

"That girl," Pallett said, dropping his voice to a broken, rasping whisper, "had refused to come forward at an altar call, just as you are thinking of refusing tonight. Friend — don't do it. Don't! Don't!"

His voice rose to an agonized crescendo and he dropped his head in his folded arms on top the pulpit. There was electric, hushed silence and then the sound

of feet on the sawdust-packed aisles, the low murmur of prayer at the altar.

I sat in the choir loft and stared at the evangelist's bowed head. I was remembering something. I had heard the Reverend Pallett preach a dozen times and each time he had ended his sermon with the same dramatic gesture, the same forward fall to the pulpit, the same bent head and pillowing arms. *I wonder*, I thought suddenly, *how many sermons he preaches a year?* Two or three hundred, surely. *Does he end each of them like that?* Presently the altar was lined. We stood to sing. We sang several hymns. My attention had wandered to the seekers, but then I remembered the evangelist and turned to look at him. He was sitting in one of the pulpit chairs, directly in front of me, and as I watched he discreetly consulted his wrist watch, then turned to talk in a low voice to the song leader beside him. Under cover of the rising crescendo of prayer before them, they talked, smilingly and at length. I looked for Father. He was down at the altar, his arm around Jack Parmington's shoulders, talking to him earnestly.

I leaned forward a little and caught a tag end of the conversation in front of me. ". . . Van Elder's got the California camp this year. Drawing big crowds, I gather."

Tonight I could sit in the audience and listen to D. B. Pallett unmoved, I thought, as I ladled gravy onto mashed potatoes on the thick white china plates Cart handed me.

"Carter!" It was Father in the cafeteria doorway. "I

think there's a wind coming up. Can you leave that and come and help me tie down the tent flaps before service?"

Sure enough, little heralding gusts were flicking the sides of the eating tent. The people coming in had a brisk, blown look.

"That's Colorado for you," someone said proudly. "One minute calm as a cucumber; next minute you got a thunderstorm."

Before the last diner had been served, the long, table-filled tent was dim and leaves were blowing against the screened sides. I hurried stacks of dishes in to the kitchen crew with one eye on the ominous sky outside. The cars bumping down the dusty road into the campground had their lights on, and their beams ran luridly down the tentside as they passed.

The first scudding drops of rain were popping on the canvas roofs as I ran, with my apron over my head, toward my tent. I saw out of the corner of my eye as I fled that Carter and Father had fastened down the last side flap on the big tabernacle. People were already filing in through the one narrow opening and I could hear the blats and squeaks from the orchestra as they tuned up for the evening song service.

By the time I'd changed my clothes and hurried over to the tabernacle the song service was nearly over. Instead of the usual hearty, informal feeling of the early evening, I could sense, the minute I stepped inside the big tent, a strange, brooding aura of tension.

I'd had that feeling in a revival service once or twice

before in my life, and for a minute I almost turned around and went outside again. I saw Cart and Greta, however, and slid into the seat they'd saved for me. Even though the congregation was singing "Come Over into Canaan," a cheerful, bouncing sort of tune, tonight the song seemed to have a wailing, minor note in it, and no one seemed to be singing very heartily. The powerful light globes dangling at intervals overhead swayed with the weaving canvas and cast moving shadows over the faces below. The platform seemed far away, and the voice of the district superintendent as he made several announcements seemed to reach us hollowly. Roscoe Lane, the evangelist singer, sang his usual solo, but tonight he went straight through it without repeating choruses or switching, impromptu, into another hymn.

By the time Pallett stood to preach, it was raining hard outside and the wind had risen. The canvas side curtains snapped in irregular, staccato rhythms and the tent ropes made a groaning, straining sound against the wind. The evangelist didn't read a Scripture. He didn't bow his head for a preliminary prayer. He walked around the pulpit and stood facing the audience, a small man, his arms hanging at his side, his pale, bespectacled face stern and solemn. He only stood, silent, for what seemed like minutes, while the storm shook the tent. Someone somewhere caught his breath in a short, quick gasp and you could hear the sound all over the big tabernacle.

"'Man goeth to his long home,'" the evangelist said

in a soft, reaching, accentless voice, " 'and the mourners go about the streets.' "

He was silent again, staring ahead of him through his black-rimmed glasses. A woman moaned and the wind outside echoed the sound.

He began preaching, talking in a level, dead voice in complete contrast with his usual fiery manner. His voice put shivers along your spine; it made your palms damp, your mouth dry. You could feel the tension mounting and mounting in the tent, exquisitely, unbearably. It was an invisible, tangible contagion.

All at once the wind seemed to burst through the side curtains; the smell of wet grass and trees came in and a feeling of the dark, wild night outside. And with the gust, the lights went out.

A child began crying. There were running feet and voices somewhere and everything was black and confusion. The pianist began to play "Nearer, My God, to Thee," softly, tollingly, in a minor key and the evangelist's voice rose high and keening through the darkness.

"Listen to the music," he said, "and think — imagine they are playing it at your funeral. Death is close to us at every minute. You may die tonight. When the death rattle is in your throat, the death dew on your brow — then what account can you give to God?"

I wanted to run. I wanted to get away. But the voice held me there. "Are you *Sure*? Are you ready to meet God this very instant?"

*If I were somewhere else*, I pleaded frantically to the awful God, *if it were light and daytime and I were alone* — I could be sure. But now — now —

There was a circle of light against the tent beside me and I heard Father's voice and Brother Hoolick's.

"— box of fuses," Father was saying. "Watch for that tent rope."

I watched the circle bobbing by. It was as if someone had lit a candle in hell. And then the lights went on, the beautiful, the golden, the bright, bright lights.

Down in front at the altar I saw that a score of people were kneeling — they hadn't even waited for the sermon to end. They'd run, stumbling down the aisles in the blackness.

Greta and Carter were both gone. I didn't know whether they'd gone down front or vanished outside. I didn't much care. All at once, I was overcome with a weighted, intense exhaustion. I went out the side door and through the diminishing rain to my tent. I pulled off my clothes with laboring effort and dropped on my cot like a woman ninety years old.

I was tired — tired —

As I dropped off to sleep I looked up at the moving leaf shadows on the canvas overhead and wished desolately and achingly that I were seven again, back at calm, heavenly Wheyton Park.

## Chapter Nineteen

*"A charge to keep I have . . ."*

IF YOU CHECKED BACK, YOU COULD PROBABLY unearth a September 1931 magazine illustration captioned "Daughter Goes to College." The picture, an advertisement for luggage or fall campus clothes, probably featured a portly Dad with gray hair, plus fours and an appropriately sorrowful expression, a Mother in beige flat crepe, who wiped her eyes as she watched the redcap wheel the three bags, the steamer trunk, the portable phonograph and the canvas-shrouded tennis rackets along the hooded alley beside the black flank of the train. In the center of the illustration was Daughter, Going-Away-to-College Daughter, in red beret, long pleated skirt and saddle shoes. You knew, looking at the picture, that she was on her way to Mount Holyoke or University of Michigan or Smith or Mills or Bryn Mawr.

In September 1931, I was part of a picture, "Daughter Goes to College," too. The picture could hardly have been used to advertise anything, since it was too crowded for the best artistic composition. The whole family had



come down to see me off, even Grandma. If we'd been down in the Union Station or even at the Greyhound bus terminal, we wouldn't have been quite so crowded, but we were standing in a circle in the middle of the Green Arrow bus station. The bus station was also the lobby of a rundown Larimer Street hotel. Fare to Los Angeles, California, from Denver, Colorado, by Green Arrow was three dollars and sixty-five cents cheaper than by Greyhound. We hadn't even inquired about the train fare.

Mother looked around the dim, gloomy room uneasily and then back at me. "I hope you're going to be all right on the bus," she said, and the solicitude in her voice brought the just-dried tears back to my eyes again. I nodded without speaking.

"And," she said, with a sort of hurried, flustered look, "I hope you're going to be happier at college than you've been at home this summer, Hannah."

I looked at her in surprise and then looked quickly away. I hadn't really been aware, I realized, that I was unhappy, hadn't realized what had motivated me to go to college. I'd only been aware of a consuming restlessness.

After all, home had never seemed pleasanter than it had this summer. Life had had a relaxed, sociable quality. Back in Los Arboles, when I was in high school, it had always seemed to me that the boys and girls my age were too afraid of Father to come near the parsonage. Jane Ferris, in fact, once confessed to me that she lay on their

dining room couch one day for an hour, pretending to be asleep, because Father was sitting in the living room waiting for Brother Ferris to come home.

But now Father seemed, all at once, less stern and frightening. He still worked hard but he was learning to play a little, too. He had bought fishing tackle and a tennis racket and he often went horseback riding. He put up a ping-pong table in the basement and could beat any of us at the game. Nearly every evening there was a gang of young people in the house, playing ping-pong, making sandwiches or candy in the kitchen, or sitting out on the wide front porch. It was just what I'd always dreamed of when I was fourteen, back in Los Arboles.

Hardly a week had gone by this past summer without a string of True Believer cars winding up Lookout Mountain or edging noisy Bear Creek. Carter and Jonnie usually led the cavalcade in Cart's precious jalopy. Often I rode with the Norrises, whose two girls were about my age. Secretly I felt far, far older than Diana and Pauline, however, because they had little interest in boys as yet and usually spent their time on the picnic trips looking for specimens for a basement museum they conducted. I had got used to sharing the back seat of their car with lichen-covered rocks, muddy plants in bursting paper sacks and even the skull of a range cow which Diana insisted was a buffalo cranium.

I had friends. I liked my afternoon job at the library. I had little of the constant, secret feeling of division, of

being pulled two ways, that I'd had in high school. Life should have been completely satisfactory.

It was leisurely and pleasant being at home with Mother, Grandma and little James Webster in the mornings, after Eunice and Elizabeth left for grammar school, Cart and Jonnie for high school and Father for his daily round of calls and church business.

Solemn, precocious James Webster was funny and delightful in everything that he did. He had an imaginary playmate with a much more aggressive, belligerent personality than his own. He tried selling the contents of our trash barrel to the neighbors up and down the street. And he particularly loved to be read to or told stories, preferably sad ones. As he listened, his sober, dark-lashed eyes grew wide and anguished, and finally the tears would roll down his cheeks. There was one story he couldn't hear often enough, in spite of its harrowing effect on him.

In answer to his pleadings, Mother, after flashing me a vexed, laughing look, would begin, "Once there was a man who had to make a horseback journey to take two bags of gold to a place of safety. His faithful dog Bruno went with him."

James Webster's eyes and mouth were three round circles in his intent face.

"Bruno followed closely at his master's heels, guarding the gold in the saddlebags, and each night when the man built his campfire and slept, Bruno lay close beside him,

watching while his master was asleep. One morning, however, the traveler woke up, saddled his horse and rode off, leaving the bags of gold by his dying campfire."

James Webster moved closer and closer to Mother, his eyebrows making a little worried tent above his eyes.

"Poor Bruno ran after his master, barking furiously, then back toward the campsite. He kept doing this, time after time, until his master grew angry. 'Come on, Bruno!' he yelled. But Bruno kept barking and running back toward the fire. Finally the man thought to himself, 'I do believe that dog has gone mad.'"

Here James Webster always broke into loud, anticipatory sobs. "Then the man drew his gun and shot his dog. But Bruno dragged himself slowly back, and when his master found him, he was lying with his woolly white head on the saddlebags of gold — dead."

James Webster, weeping loudly, always flung himself against Mother's knees for comfort.

"Now don't ever ask me to tell you that silly story again!" she said, crossly, winking at me above his head. I'd been more aware of Mother as a person this past summer, instead of as the central goddess of the household. I'd been aware of her own individual characteristics — that she gave Father added human warmth and tolerance, just as he added to her self-confidence and assurance.

And Mother had known all along that I was pos-

sessed with incompleteness, dissatisfaction! Perhaps she'd even put the idea of Kelsey College in my head, I didn't know. Father hadn't been sure I was good college material.

"You'll just go out there and get married," he'd said, and I couldn't tell by his expression whether he was teasing me or not. "What do you want to be?"

I couldn't say. I didn't know. But at any rate, I was going to college, the True Believer school in California. I looked around the lobby and saw my fellow passengers; it was easy to pick them out from the hotel guests, the all-over gray, unexpectant-looking men, lying on their spines in relaxed old chairs down both sides of the tunnel-like room. The passengers were the salesmen, with bloodshot eyes and scratched-up sample cases; the two scared-looking farm hands in levis, with red faces below white foreheads; the woman with the floor-crawling baby and the shopping bag of diapers.

Our family, I thought, looked out of place, but we would have looked out of place down beside the Pullman on Track 8 at the Union Station. We looked *in* place over at the caramel-colored brick parsonage on Elati Street, or at Denver First, with its narrow, sooty, stained-glass windows, or under a canvas camp meeting tabernacle, or sitting in the bare, splintery chairs at Baker's Rescue Mission on Saturday nights.

Father was on his way now to noon prayer meeting at the Free Methodist church. He had a large black Bible

under his arm, and his face, usually sober, but sometimes sober-cheerful, was sober-gloomy today. He sighed heavily each time he looked at me.

"You're sure you have enough money?" he asked again.

I nodded jerkily to the rhetorical question. I had ten dollars and fifteen cents in my new pocketbook, and I had two ten-dollar bills pinned inside my brassière. To me it seemed like a lot of money, even though Father had said he wished he could give me more. I had been warned that it must last me until I got to California, registered at Kelsey and got a job as mother's helper for my board and room.

Grandma, who had detached herself from the circle to roam restlessly around the long room, peering nearsightedly at the people sunk in the tired chairs, came back and patted me briskly on the arm. She told Mother, in a relieved voice, "You don't need to worry about her, Mary. See that woman over there?" She made a backward-jerking gesture with her white head toward a middle-aged woman in the far dimness under the stairs by the clerk's desk. "She says she'll be glad to watch out after Hannah. She's got two girls of her own. Name is Sister — I mean — Mrs. Watson."

There was a sad, tinny bleating in the alley. A door in the understairs dusk opened and the fumes of gasoline and the loud sputter of a motor came in. The clerk lifted up his voice. "Bus to Greeley, Cheyenne, Laramie

Salt Lake City, Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Right this way," he intoned mournfully.

I wiped my eyes and started to rush after the shuffle-footed group funneling into the alley. Mother pulled me back and enfolded me, weeping audibly. Even Grandma, the stern and rock-bound, started to cry. Actually, two neat, round tears rolled in parallel wet tracks down her mauve-pink wrinkled cheeks. I looked fearfully over her shoulder at the alley door as she held me against the firm battlements of her corsets. My muscles jerked when the motor accelerated with an abrupt, room-filling roar.

"The bus is leaving!" My voice was shrill.

"It won't leave," said Father, reassuring me completely. Father was always sure to be right. I distributed hasty pecks around the rest of the family. Father was last. He held my hand in a crushing grip and looked straight and searchingly into my tear-sodden eyes.

"Be a good girl, Daughter," he said in the voice with which he took members into the church or baptized converts or buried the dead. "Read your Bible. Avoid the very appearance of evil. Don't forget to pray. And write home often."

"Keep your clothes mended," Mother quavered behind him, her handkerchief over her mouth, her brown eyes round and brimming with love and moisture.

"Don't speak to strangers," said Grandma briskly. "Stay with Sister — Mrs. Watson."

"Bus to Cheyenne, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, Los

Angeles, leaving at once," droned the desk clerk, his incurious eyes on us.

Motor gunned, the Green Arrow lurched down the alley while I reeled along its uncarpeted, swaying aisle to a seat across from Sister — Mrs. Watson. She gave me a genial, gold-toothed smile around the shoulder of her seatmate, a pug-nosed bald-headed man in a wrinkled gray suit, who was steadying her arm as she poured a clear, aromatic fluid from a flat tin flask into a folding cup.

"Watch it, Ma," said a husky-sweet voice directly behind me and I turned around to see what must be my chaperon's two daughters, girls about my age, with tight pink-and-white sweaters, high penciled eyebrows and Harlow-white hair. The nearest one gave me a large, knowing, gorgeous wink and waved her thumb at her mother.

"Started already," she told me with radiant comradeship.

"Hey you, back there!" the bus driver said loudly, his eyes beneath his visor brim reflected hard and impatient in the rearview mirror. "Put that bottle away or get off the bus! No drinking on here!"

Everyone laughed at once, loudly and warmly, and everyone looked around at the pair across from me and then at each other with grin-narrowed eyes. I laughed uncertainly, sharing smiles with the cotton blondes behind me and a red-faced farm hand who looked back



from the front seat behind the driver. After all, I thought, feeling a little thirsty myself, there *was* a drinking fountain right there in plain sight in the hotel lobby!

I looked out of the window quickly, but the hotel was out of sight. We were going down Larimer Street with its bums and pawnshops and smeary café windows. Old man Baker himself was asleep in a chair in the doorway of his mission, a copy of the *Pentecostal Herald* over his face to keep off the flies.

I was leaving Denver: The maple trees and the rows of all-alike brick houses, the white-marble-and-green-grass of the Civic Center, the leafy parks and Cherry Creek and Daniel's and Fisher's tower. The church, with Father thundering from behind the pulpit, with all the good, familiar brothers-and-sisters-in-the-Lord lined up in long rows below him. Mother and the parsonage, and my room with its faded yellow-flowered wallpaper and Grandma's quilting frames crowding all the furniture against the windows. Dinner at night with nine of us around the long table in the ugly, comfortable, walnut-shiny dining room. Always before we'd left together — all of us. But now I was leaving alone. Leaving until Christmas, maybe, but most likely until next summer. Or even — for good.

My throat closed convulsively as I remembered my father's words at family prayer that morning, addressed half to me and half to the Almighty.

"We know not what may happen in the coming year,

Lord. Our life here is only a breath, a thought, between eternities. We never know when we will be called into the presence of God. For the first time, Lord, our family circle is being broken; one of our number is going from us. May she go, Lord, in Thy care, free from danger, but Lord, especially — *free from sin*. Keep us all ready at any instant for Thy coming, so that we may gather a united family around Thy Great White Throne.”

*We will, Father, we will!* I made him the promise across the brick and stone barriers of the city. *I will come back from college, changed miraculously into the kind of unquestioning, steady, devout True Believer girl you want me to be.*

The bus left a narrow dark street between factories to bump down a block of worn brick paving and emerge all at once onto the sudden smoothness of the boulevard, flashing metallically with passing cars. The tires sang. The buildings thinned enough to show the far white line of mountains against a water-color sky.

We were passing a cemetery, green-topped now with summer's heaviest foliage, but looking through its wrought-iron gates I remembered the funeral Father had conducted there in the middle of the previous winter. The old man in the coffin at the mortuary had been a charity patient from the general hospital. In the room, during the short service, there had been only Father, Sister Level and I. I played the piano while Sister Level sang; then Father had read the Scripture and said a

few words above the wasted old body in the cloth-covered gray box.

Although the mortician had suggested that it was hardly necessary on such a cold day for Father to accompany the hearse to the cemetery, we had driven out to the burial grounds. The wind had been icy; it went through my clothes as if they were gauze. The sky had been sullen and gray and the whole landscape had had a grim, depressing bleakness. Father had bared his head, and with his wiry dark hair blowing in the wind had read the grave-side service from the church manual, had prayed, had, in fact, performed all the same rituals he would have used if a circle of mourners had been listening.

I remembered, too, how Father had worried about fifteen-year-old Hal Liggett, who'd been sure after a revival meeting that he'd "crossed the Dead Line" — that he had sinned against the Holy Spirit and would never be able to hear God's voice again. Father had talked with him over and over, assuring him of God's everlasting mercies, and when the Liggetts moved away, Father had even written several letters to Hal to reassure him.

I remembered Father praying, patiently and earnestly, Sunday night after Sunday night, beside old Brother Thompson, who had been a chronic seeker for ten years, so long that even the most sympathetic church members referred to him privately as "Doubting Thompson."

I remembered the time Father put up a revival tent

alone, working all day, and went back to find the ropes cut and the stakes pulled up and the canvas lying in tangled piles in the dust. He'd never said a word but, tired as he was, started in to mend the ropes and haul the canvas and pound the stakes again.

I thought again of his face, serene and calm, haloed in the flashlight, reading to us during the thunderstorm in Arizona.

All the bitter, wrangling, futile arguments I'd had with him, all my reproaches and recriminations faded away in my mind, and I remembered only Father's shining, singular goodness.

Father was a rock, steadfast, high and unmovable. I was, I knew, more like a sand dune, shifted and shaped by every wind that blew.

*Leaving Denver*, said a black and white metal sign, *Resume Speed*.

Surely, surely, I thought, looking down the white tape of road unrolling ahead of me, four years at Kelsey will make me like Father, will stop my secret, unhappy wavering for good and all!

## Chapter Twenty

*"I only covet, more and more, The clear and single eye"*

Oh, this is like heaven to me,  
Yes, this is like heaven to me;  
I've crossed over Jordan to Canaan's fair land,  
And this is like heaven to me.

WITH MY GREEN FRESHMAN TAM ON MY head, with my roommate, Velma Hyning, on one side of me and Nancy Bragdon on the other, I stood in my assigned place in the back of the bare, barnlike college chapel and sang the familiar words at the top of my lungs. It was a well-worn True Believer song and I knew it by heart, but it had never had so much meaning for me.

The golden streets, lofty white palaces and ineffable harp music of Heaven were mistily distant, but for the present, the scuffed, dusty Kelsey College campus, with its few plain, poor buildings and four hundred students, was a very satisfactory substitute. After one week at the school the whole shabby landscape had a gilded look for me.

The rickety women's dormitory was home to me al-

ready, and my first critical survey that took in its sagging roof littered with eucalyptus leaves, its long, bare parlor filled with broken-down velours couches and scratched rocking chairs, and its uncarpeted, tunnel-like halls, had now softened to a loving warmth that ignored the fact that there was only one bathroom to a floor or that the room I shared with Velma had a broken windowpane, a hump-backed white iron bed, a single wooden dresser, a library table, two straight chairs, a light globe dangling nakedly from a long green cord — and nothing else.

As the chapel service proceeded through announcements, prayer, hymns and student testimonies, I only half listened, savoring the deliciousness of looking back over this first week in college. It was like nothing else before in my life, a composite of the best of camp meeting, district assembly and public high school rolled into one. The routine of attending classes, getting assignments for themes and term papers and book reports was like Los Arboles High, but at the same time I was surrounded by people who knew me, who knew Father and who asked respectfully how “Denver First” was doing.

“Auntie” Carruthers, the languishingly sweet-and-Southern dormitory mother, knew Father and gushed flatteringly over me. Even red-haired, impressive Dr. Velie, the new college president, stopped when he met me in the hall and sent greetings to Father.

And in the dormitory, where I was staying until Auntie Carruthers could find me a suitable part-time job for my

board and room, there were a number of girls I'd known before — preachers' daughters I'd met at district assemblies and girls who'd belonged to various churches where Father had been pastor.

Velma, my snub-nosed blond roommate, was from Colorado, too; her mother was pastor of one of the bare, poverty-stricken little plains churches. I'd seen Velma once before at district assembly and envied her the two gawky boys who'd been trailing her; she confided that she'd envied me my exalted position as daughter of Denver First.

The occupants of the dormitory were as glamorous to me as if they were members of an exclusive sorority.

Across the hall from Velma and me, rooming in solitary affluence, was Sandra Overholt, daughter of the topflight evangelistic team, Bill and Betty Overholt. Through the open door I'd stared fascinatedly at Sandra's fur coat, thrown carelessly over a splintery chair — the only fur coat at Kelsey College, I was sure. The bed had been heaped with stunning new clothes, and the room was littered with all the correct coed appurtenances — a portable radio, a tennis racket in a press, a shiny black typewriter on the library table.

The past golden week in the dormitory had been a medley of all the college stories I'd ever read — the doors banging, the running steps on the stairs, the voices calling back and forth from room to room. Velma and a half dozen other girls and I drifted in slow, laughing groups

down to the drugstore for "Cokes"; we sat on the dormitory steps in the dusk talking to the boys from the men's dorm; we gathered in a transom-darkened room after Lights Out for long sessions of talk and lukewarm tea and graham crackers.

After dinner in the dining hall each evening there were regular devotions, with one of the students standing to read the Scripture and everyone kneeling afterwards for prayers. Curious eyes strayed across the room, between the chair backs, and, catching other curious eyes, shut with a flutter of devoutness.

Classes were exciting thus far, made up of the old and the new — familiar True Believer words and high-school-learned routines mixed with unfamiliar college words and ways. The prayer at the beginning of each class was a familiar thing, and so were some of the class sessions. I was required to take Holiness and Power from old Dr. Bonner, one of the founders of the church, mighty in his day but now so deaf and absent-minded that legends had grown up about him. Leo Gorham, one of the sophomore boys, swore that last year he had handed in his geology notebook with a title page reading "Holiness and Power," that Dr. Bonner had hefted it, smiled benignly and given him an A. But hearing Dr. Bonner's words, the familiar True Believer doctrine explained in his slow, cracked old voice, I could close my eyes and imagine myself sitting in a summer afternoon camp meeting service or in a Denver Sunday School class.



When I attended Milo Arthur's sociology class and heard the students arguing fiercely over whether a college freshman should be allowed to date on week nights, I felt loftily that I might as well be back in a Los Arboles beginning orientation class.

And when dapper, polite Professor Larsen, the French teacher, insisted that we begin using the language immediately I was back for an instant in Miss Payne's Spanish class at Los Arboles, even though there I'd been *Señorita Hannah* instead of *Mademoiselle Merriam*.

Professor Larsen, it was rumored on the campus, had once been a member of Swedish nobility. Already I'd learned that he was an aggressive defender of Culture, even though some of his colleagues considered his attitude both precious and "worldly."

The first morning in French class, Professor Larsen had, in his pursuit of Culture, made formal introductions all around the class.

"Monsieur Perkins; Mademoiselle Hoag." Up and down the rows he had us nodding self-consciously at our neighbors.

"Mademoiselle Merriam; Monsieur Smith." I was on the end of the aisle and had to turn around to look at Monsieur Smith. He was big and good-looking and friendly. He gave me a frank, blue-eyed smile and winked. I turned around quickly and stared fixedly at the blackboard, my face pink, my breath coming a little faster.

"Did you ever see anyone as good-looking as that Smith

boy?" Velma asked me on the way out. "That one, there with Shevlin Ives."

I looked, with careful carelessness. "Oh, that one?" I asked mendaciously, watching his wavy brown hair and broad shoulders disappear into the crowd in the hall. "Who is he, anyway?"

Velma's voice was full of animated information. "He's a junior, I think. He isn't a True Believer, and he went to some men's college back East before he came here."

College was packed with glamorous opportunities for research. I craned my neck to look down the hall but he was out of sight. "He looks *old* — I mean, at least twenty-five!"

Velma nodded importantly. She lowered her voice. "And listen, I'll tell you something else! He and Shevlin are the only two students in school who *smoke*!"

"Oh," I sighed, in complete disappointment. Clovis Smith was not for me, I thought, and remembered happily that I had a date for Friday night with a senior, Gene Armstrong. Gene was homely; he had little black eyes and a big nose, but he was popular, he was witty, and he was going to be a minister. Father would approve of Gene heartily. The name *Armstrong* alone would please Father; one of Gene's brothers was president of another True Believer college; another was editor of the church paper.

As the closing chapel bell rang, however, my eyes strayed over to the junior section, where Clovis and Shevlin sat side by side. Even though Clovis was outside the

fold, I was still a little glad to remember that he would be in my English comp class next period.

Freshman English was the high point of my day, anyway. English had always been my favorite subject in high school and now, having passed the screening examinations successfully, I could spend a whole year writing compositions without any dull supplementary exercises in grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Even the students who didn't like English enjoyed this class, I thought, as I took my assigned seat in the front row. The teacher, Mark George, wasn't much older than we were. Although his long-boned face and worn tweeds gave him a British look, I knew he had come from a True Believer church in Colorado, as I had, that he was a recent graduate of Kelsey himself. In "Prof" George's class, though, I felt a difference, a newness. It was hard to put my finger on; I only knew that I, like everyone else in the class, waited with alertness and interest each day for what he had to say.

Today Prof had a stack of the blue-bound entrance examinations on his desk and he tapped them significantly, grinning his stiff-lipped, homely grin. "I'm returning these to you with written comments," he said. "You may find some of the notes run slightly longer than your themes. There are two of the papers I'd like to read to you."

Hope stirred me and I glared impatiently at Sandra, for whom Professor George was politely waiting. San-

dra, I had learned already, was given to dramatic late entrances. Today she had her fur coat slung over her shoulders, although it was still September, and she was wearing a flame-red dress. She sauntered in, gave Professor George a languorous smile and slid gracefully into her seat, which was now sumptuously cushioned in gray squirrel.

Professor George gave her a little bow. "Very effective," he said, and she laughed along with everyone else.

"This first theme," he said, picking up one of the blue books, "is called 'The Deserted Garden.' I think you'll know from hearing it that it was written by a girl."

It was. And she sat blushing while he read it, as honored as if she'd been chosen for the Nobel Prize.

The next composition was entirely different from my Swinburne-ish, adjective-laden rhapsody. The first sentence was clear, decisive and — in a Kelsey College classroom — startling. But Professor George read it as if he were quoting from the Apostles' Creed.

"I believe in the theory of evolution. There is no other satisfactory explanation for the pattern of life on this world."

### *Evolution?*

Everyone sat forward in his seat. Someone somewhere murmured a shocked comment in his throat. We all listened, popeyed, till the last sentence and then relaxed, waiting for the castigation we knew would follow. All of us had heard evangelists, over and over, hurl with thun-

dering scorn at their audiences, "My great-grandfather didn't hang from a tree limb by his tail! I was created by the hand of God!"

But Professor George wasn't talking about evolution at all, I realized. He began to talk about God. He talked about courage, the courage of an open, enlightened mind, about freedom, of being able to read everything with a critical eye, examining it without previous bias and drawing one's own conclusions.

All at once I felt as if I were really in college, as if learning could be a thrilling, challenging thing, that the shabby young professor was eager, bursting to pass on ideas to us.

Progress, he was saying, was made by the dissatisfied. "Don't be afraid to be an honest doubter," he told us with impetuous earnestness. "The rebels in one generation set the pattern for the conservatives of the next generation to follow. John Wesley and Martin Luther were heretics."

At the familiar, orthodox names, a certain amount of relaxation crept over the room. But now Professor George, almost in the same breath, was reading poetry from a slim black book.

The world stands out on either side  
No wider than the heart is wide;  
Above the world is stretched the sky, —  
No higher than the soul is high.

The heart can push the sea and land  
Farther away on either hand;  
The soul can split the sky in two,  
And let the face of God shine through.

A new idea was struggling in the depths of my mind. Had I misunderstood what he was trying to say? All my life long I'd been taught that there was a *canon of truth* — to be held as a shield against Error — the error that existed in secular literature, philosophy and science. It was dangerous to venture into these other fields; one might destroy his faith. I'd heard frequent sermon illustrations about promising young ministerial students who'd gone to godless state universities and become modernists, Higher Critics.

Nevertheless, there had been something he'd just said — I tried to recall the words of the verse he'd read.

“ — the world stands out on either side no wider than the — mind — is wide — ”?

I looked out the window and had the dizzying sensation that the walls had fallen away and that a world without barriers lay around me. I was an explorer on the edge of a new continent, but for a minute I was sure that I could never venture into its unknown ranges. I looked back over my shoulder at my old shamed, secret rebellions, and dissatisfactions with new eyes. Had Professor George actually said, “*God loves an honest doubter*”?

Someone else had evidently not gone on with the procedure of the class, either. An oldish young man several seats from me suddenly shot up his hand in the middle of a discussion of the next assignment. Without waiting for recognition from the instructor, he asked with crashing bluntness, "Look here, Prof, I'm still thinking about that last paper you read. Do you believe in evolution?"

The class jarred to a skidding halt, waiting for Professor George's answer. With quick partisanship, they looked at him with worried eyes, but they relaxed again when they heard his words.

"Do I believe that my great-grandfather hung from a limb by his tail?" he asked with a faint smile. "No. I do believe, however, that 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.'"

He went on with his lecture, but for the first time I was doing what he had advised earlier — looking at what I heard with critical, weighing eyes. The earnest young man down the row seemed satisfied with the answer, but I wasn't. Why, Professor George hadn't really answered the question at all! Somehow I knew that he would never give answers, those final, dogmatic, authoritarian answers I was used to, expected, depended on.

The sound of my name pulled me back into the room.

". . . wrote the first one I read," the teacher was saying, evidently in answer to a question, "and Burke Raymond wrote the second."

Eyes turned, not in my direction, but in Burke's. I stared, too. I saw a thin, hollow-eyed boy, shabbily dressed, his high forehead topped by a thatch of unruly black hair. The general scrutiny didn't seem to bother him; he looked back calmly. I realized, on seeing him, that I knew who he was, the son of a pair of pioneer True Believer missionaries. Brother and Sister Raymond had spent their lives in the interior of South America, but their jungle surroundings made such a poor environment for children that one by one they had sent the little Raymonds — six of them — back to be raised in foster homes in the United States. Burke, someone had told me, had been brought up in a series of families but now was staying with a red-faced, fanatical couple who supervised his every move with suspicious eyes and locked him in his room each night. Evidently they hadn't been able to keep his mind under padlock, I thought, with mingled disapproval and admiration.

"Burke," Professor George said, "since you're interested in examining both sides of a question, perhaps you'd like to sign up for Debate. I'm trying to get enough students together for six teams, if possible. Debate is our only intercollegiate activity, and I'm anxious for Kelsey to make a good showing at the Redlands freshman tournament. All of you who are interested, please remain after class."

*Debate? Public Speaking?* Was I interested? I'd hated speech class at Los Arboles High; I'd been so frightened



my teeth chattered. But now, to my own surprise, I found that I was interested, wanted to stay.

There were about a dozen students left after the bell rang; the dozen included Shevlin Ives — and Clovis Smith. Besides Burke, there were two or three young ministerial students and four girls: Jane Ferris from Los Arboles, Nancy Bragdon, Velma and I.

Before I knew what had happened, I was half a debate team. The debate question, I learned, was "Resolved: That the United States should cancel its war debts." I hadn't even known that the World War wasn't paid for. I was absorbed in listening to a furious argument that had sprung up between Burke and Clovis over the world's monetary exchange. I didn't know *anything*, I realized, listening to the duel.

Burke was as coldly, calmly logical as a calculating machine. He could marshal facts and figures on even the most obscure points with a virtuosity that was underlined by its very ease and slowness.

Clovis had obviously read less on the subject, but he was tearing at Burke's arguments with a fiery, preposterous airiness. His approach was that of a duelist, slashing, glancing and lunging, while Burke's slow, cautious statements had the impact of cannon fire. Professor George sat on the corner of his desk, listened with amused, pleased eyes, impressed, I could see, by Burke's brilliance.

Everyone was listening to them and looking at them with interest — they were so opposite in everything. Burke

was almost cadaverously thin, haggard-looking, hunched awkwardly forward in his seat. Clovis had an easy, casual look as he leaned back, his long legs thrust casually out in front of him, his blue eyes lively, one hand coming out of his jacket pocket occasionally for a flat, sweeping, emphatic gesture. Shevlin, Clovis's inseparable buddy, sat on the arm of the chair next to him, one blond lock of hair falling into his eyes, his jaws moving rhythmically as he chewed. Every once in a while he cheered Clovis on with a Georgia-drawled, "Yore tellin' him, Son." Shevlin, I was pretty sure, was a fervent admirer of Will Rogers.

The argument was all a part of this strange, exciting, unfamiliar morning. There was so much to know in the world — and I was so ignorant! I was impatient, fiercely impatient. I wanted to know something — even the world's monetary system sounded fascinating, particularly when the blue-eyed, broad-shouldered Clovis Smith discussed it in his easy, slurred Texas voice.

But outside, afterward, I seized Velma's arm in abrupt realization. "Listen!" I said desperately. "You'll have to get another debate partner. I couldn't debate — against an *outside* college! I wouldn't mind here at Kelsey, with only True Believers in the audience, but at Redlands, with U.S.C. and U.C.L.A. and Occidental, and all the other big schools — I'd *die*!"

Velma looked back over her shoulder to be sure we were alone in the hall. "Don't be silly!" she said airily. "I can't debate either. But we'd have packs of fun going

on debate trips — just four girls with all those fellows. And if you drop out, I won't have a partner. You've got to stay in."

I could try *one* debate, I thought reluctantly. Just to be sure I'd have something to say when I did debate, I took the precaution of memorizing one affirmative speech and one negative and accumulating a sheaf of quotations from authorities on each side of the question. Walking the eight blocks to my new mother's-helper job, I said the quotations and two speeches over and over again. Anyway, the tournament was a comforting month away, and a good deal of the time I didn't think about it at all.

My life was taking on a certain cleavage. I was flattered and excited to be dating Gene Armstrong. On Sundays we often drove down to the beach town where his father was pastor and I felt an upsurge of homesickness in being in a True Believer parsonage again, in taking part in all the familiar Sunday rituals — Sunday School, church, the big dinner after the morning service with the interesting, pleasantly gossipy "shop talk."

". . . Sister Marrow wasn't here this morning. I hope she isn't chasing off to the Four Square again."

"I wish Janie McManus would take her baby outside when it squalls. I could hardly hear myself preach this morning."

"That woman down front with the green hat was new, wasn't she?"

"Gene, you going to show up your dad tonight?"

And when Gene preached that night I sat up front and felt the knowing, interested eyes of the strange congregation on me. I had an almost wifely pride listening while Gene preached and I wondered, listening, if some day I'd be doing this all the time while Gene, or some other young minister, preached from a True Believer pulpit. I felt at home in the little chapel; it was like Los Arboles or Blanchfield. All the people knew each other so well that there was a tangible family feeling in the small room. And across the platform wall was the familiar brown, Old-English lettering, "Holiness Becometh Thine House, O Lord, Forever."

*Father would be so proud if I married a minister*, I thought, with a little ache of homesickness in the back of my throat. *He'd like Gene*. Gene was preaching the same sort of sermon I'd heard all my life. His text was, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." He said the same things about the verse that Father would have said, that when one really knew he was a Christian, he had freedom to do anything he wanted — to speak on a street corner, to say "Amen" in church service, to testify to sinful fellow employees.

Quite abruptly, Gene's text had a different meaning for me. That's what Professor George was talking about that day in class, I realized slowly. Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free! The truth wasn't all bound up in one little parcel. The truth wasn't a corral with a high-barred gate. The truth was boundless,

limitless, as universal as air, as wide as the universe.

Gene was making the familiar test at the end of his sermon. He came around to the side of the pulpit and stood there with his black eyes soberly searching the faces of his small audience.

"Are you *sure* just now that you are a Christian?" he asked. "If God should call for your soul tonight, would you be ready? Everyone in the house who knows he's ready to go, this instant, stand up!"

Was I *sure*? I stood up, promptly and automatically. After all, it would hardly be diplomatic to let Gene's church think the minister's son was dating an unbeliever. But standing there I knew that I wasn't *sure* — that I was never *sure*. I'd been born unsure! And remembering all the honest, humble people who, revival after revival, returned to the mourner's bench, I knew, too, that I wasn't alone.

The Redlands tournament was the next Friday afternoon. Velma and I borrowed clothes up and down the dormitory. Sandra came through handsomely with a stunning red suede jacket, and I felt, wearing it, that a debate judge would award me the decision on sight. As soon as we were out of sight of the college, we both hastily painted on exaggeratedly red mouths, ignoring the disapproving glances from the three ministerial students riding with us in Professor George's rattly old car.

It was a lovely, sunny California afternoon and we were all young and giddy with high spirits. Josh Willson,

one of the ministerial trio, made a grandiose, punning speech to Professor George, presenting him with an enormous, imaginary tournament cup, and Prof responded with caricatured pomp. I felt full of confidence, holding in my lap the wooden recipe box I'd filled with file cards. Clovis Smith had furnished me with most of the typed quotations on those cards, and this fact alone gave them a special aura of authority for me. I was sure I'd win a good many of my debates. Maybe not all. Maybe not the tournament. But quite a number.

It was not until we were walking up the steps of Redlands University that my high spirits and courage all at once drained away. Standing in a laughing, talking group at one side of the entrance was Pamela Chandler, the girl who had been league president at Los Arboles High, the lofty, accomplished Pamela, lead in the senior play and star debater for the school.

All at once I felt ludicrously out of place. I was a girl from a Los Arboles street meeting, a girl who sang revival hymns in a rescue mission. A girl who had worn long black stockings to Blanchfield Grammar School.

The eyes turning our way, I was sure, saw only a shabby, rustic-looking group of Bible college students, out of place and odd on this campus. Most of the Kelsey boys wore dark suits and carried brief cases; they looked sober and old and different from the slack-and-sweater-clad men students up and down the steps. And I was wearing Sandra's red jacket over my best black dress. I

should have worn a sweater and skirt and low heels, I knew with futile, too-late certainty, looking down at my black pumps and swirling skirt.

Velma was feeling a little uneasy, too. "How'd we get into this?" she groaned and then giggled. I laughed, too, a little hysterically, as we followed the others down the crowded hall. Professor George came out of a near-by door and thrust a card into my hand. I glanced down and saw the number "4," just as someone inside a door ahead of us called out, "Four and sixteen, go to room 119-B."

I stopped, stock-still. Velma pulled impatiently at my arm. "Come on; that's us!"

I shook my head. "I'm not going!"

Just then I saw Clovis and Shevlin coming down the hall toward us. They looked beautifully familiar and beautifully at ease in these surroundings. I remembered that Clovis had come from a university like this one as he gave us a big smile and waved his numbered ticket.

Velma gave them an imploring look. I was shaking with buck fever. "Come on!" she said, through her teeth. I could only shake my head. "I'm not going!" I repeated woodenly.

"What's the matter with her?" Clovis asked Velma, looking at me.

"I can't debate!" I hissed at him, as if it were his fault. "I might draw Pamela Chandler."

He gave me a blank, baffled look, and evidently decided that Pamela was a long-time enemy of the family,

because he wheeled quickly toward the open door from which the room assignments were issuing. He glanced in at the blackboard. "She's in the main assembly hall," he called with loud reassurance.

"NOW will you come!" Velma asked in exasperation, and I followed. Clovis and Shevlin fell in beside us, both of them giving me pep talks as we hurried toward 119-B.

At the door, Clovis shook my hand solemnly and Shevlin patted me on the back. "Go in and die for good old Kelsey," he said with a falsetto tremor in his voice. Clovis looked over my head into the room. "Vast audience of one. Don't let him scare you."

Only one? Slowly I went in.

Our opponents were from a small Arizona college and when we introduced ourselves, I saw with relief that they looked as scared as we did. The shorter girl blurted out, "This is our first debate. I hope you don't mind."

Velma and I beamed at her with warm, effulgent radiance. "Ours, too," we confessed humbly.

"Break it up, girls," said a bored, masculine voice from the rear of the room. We all turned around to look at the big, bald, stooped judge who was slumped deep in his chair, his eyes on his wrist watch. "Suppose we get started."

I led off. My memorized speech fell glibly off my tongue and my knees quit quivering almost immediately, since it was apparent that the judge wasn't even listening. *This isn't so bad*, I thought with dawning relief, as the



hour wore by. I was so busy making notes for my rebuttal that I didn't listen at all to what the opponents were saying. I was sure that Clovis's impressive quotations must surely cover anything the girls from Arizona were saying.

When we had finished, we all fell on each other's necks like old-time pals. "Gad, I'm glad that's over," Tall Arizona said and Short Arizona fanned herself exaggeratedly with her debate cards.

The judge was giving us a sad, collective stare from the doorway on his way out. "If you ladies don't mind," he said in a suffering voice, "I think it's my duty to tell you that I've never heard a *poorer* debate in all my life. You seem to be entirely and *equally* void of any economic knowledge whatsoever. It will be extremely difficult for me to give either side the decision."

We all stared, openmouthed, as the door closed behind him. There was heavy, dismayed silence in the room for a minute, then Velma rallied. "Don't worry," she consoled Tall Arizona. "He *has* to give it to one side or the other, after all."

In some way or other, the debate had cheered us. We managed to get through our other three matches; evidently some sort of seeding had been done beforehand because none of the teams we met was particularly dazzling. But when the tally was chalked up on the assembly-room board, Velma and I had, we saw, lost all our debates. Every one.

For a minute I felt like hunching down in my seat, like stealing off down the hall away from the strangers, the Outsiders in the room, back to the shelter of familiar True Believer refuge. But then, looking around the big room, I began to have a new feeling, a small, tentative sense of belonging to a bigger circle, a wider world. After all, there was Professor George up in front, talking in a low voice to one of the U.S.C. coaches. Clovis, Shevlin and Burke were in a huddle on the back row with a tall Jewish boy with horn-rimmed glasses, U.C.L.A.'s star orator, I knew. Here was a world to which I could belong; I didn't have to leave it. ". . . entirely devoid of economic knowledge . . ." that first debate judge had said, and I knew, humbly, that he was right.

And again I remembered the verse Professor George had read in Freshman English class: "The heart can push the sea and land farther away on either hand."

I could, I would push the walls farther away!

Driving back home that night, Professor George didn't seem discouraged, even though Kelsey had been eliminated from the semifinals. Only Clovis and Shevlin had won nearly enough debates to qualify.

"Next time we'll be staying for the finals," Prof told Clovis, who with Shevlin and Burke was riding in our car now. I wished that Clovis were in the back seat with me, then felt ashamed of my disloyalty to Gene. Clovis was an alien, a stranger. Gene was going to be Somebody in the True Believer Church. Already he was in demand

as a speaker at the surrounding churches, I reminded myself. But I did like the looks of the back of Clovis's head — purely from a structural standpoint.

"I know!" said Burke all at once into the flying quiet. "Look — our negative case is all wrong. It's the whole matter of the world's monetary exchange again. Don't you see . . ."

"I still say our corner on the world's gold supply makes it impossible for the debtor nations to pay," Clovis took him up quickly as if the argument had been going on continuously for hours.

As I listened, the same heady, unfamiliar excitement rose in me at their duel. Always before I'd thought of education as something to be acquired in little pieces and stored away like pennies in a bank. I'd never realized that one could challenge Authority, that a thin, shaggy-haired college freshman like Burke could dare to question the assertions of learned financial experts writing in the august pages of *Forbes* or *Nation* or *Atlantic Monthly*. I'd never dreamed that an established, seemingly incontrovertible fact could be torn apart.

Burke and Clovis didn't accept anything as fixed or proved, I thought in amazement, and realized at the same time that Professor George accepted this iconoclasm calmly. Evidently to the duelists, a straight line was not of necessity the shortest distance between two points, the world was not necessarily round, the whole was not arbitrarily the sum of all its parts.

The argument was still going on when Prof stopped the car in front of the house where I was working.

"Good night," I called, valiantly trying to make myself heard above the now fiery argument.

"You can go on," Clovis said to Professor George. "I'll walk up to the door with her." Lordly and casually, he opened the car door and held out his hand to me, and I stepped out, thrilled and surprised. My sudden elation died a quick death, however, as Shevlin and Burke tumbled out of the car after him. I walked sedately up the driveway to the side door and tried to say good night again, but the argument hadn't stopped for a minute.

"Don't say *moral obligation* to me!" Clovis was saying to Burke.

"Good night!" I tried again. All three of them kept on talking. I divided a black, exasperated look among the trio and went in and slammed the door. Gene's picture was on my dresser and my glance at it, going by, held a certain quality of apology.

More and more I was conscious of the division in my life — not noticeable on the surface but apparent and poignant to me. On date nights Gene and I attended revival meetings, mission services, prayer meetings. Gene was fun to be with and he had a certain flattering prestige among the True Believers. He was popular at Kelsey, too, where a student's state of grace had a definite bearing on his chances of being elected to school offices.

But when I wasn't with Gene, I spent more and more time in the English classroom. The big corner room was the center of college for me. Clovis and Shevlin and Burke were usually there, carrying on their inevitable, interminable arguments. And the room, too, was the focus of all sorts of other campus activities. In high school I'd dreamed of taking part in plays, of writing for the school paper, of planning parties. Now, under Professor George's urging and encouragement, I had a chance to try my hand at writing and producing one act plays, writing for the school paper, working on the school annual.

My part-time job, my other classes, were a vague, necessary background for the one-room college that centered around Professor George in the same sense that a group of students in medieval times gathered around a gifted young don.

And I found myself, oftener and oftener, talking with Clovis Smith on the campus. We both had a free period several days a week just before lunch, and usually at that time we'd find ourselves sitting on the sunburned, uneven grass behind the main building, leaning against the thick-matted bole of a palm tree. Sometimes Shevlin or Burke joined us but more often we were alone.

Some of it was boy-girl talk, but a lot of it was religion. Perhaps, subconsciously, we were working out a joint philosophy, but in any case, we argued fiercely. We quarreled angrily. Clovis scoffed at some of my most treasured

shibboleths, and yet he scolded me for criticizing a visiting minister.

Kelsey viewed Clovis as, if not a black sheep, at least a rather smoke-tinged gray lamb, but he had a tremendous curiosity about the Church and an out-of-proportion awe for every minister, teacher and leader in the True Believer Church, an awe that met, over a period of time, with some disillusionment.

I had always been inside the Church and had an out-of-proportion curiosity about everything, anything, outside True Believer walls. Clovis had a dozen different environments in his background, as the child of divorced parents is likely to have: an Episcopalian prep school, a small Baptist college, a men's college in the East, a year or two working experience, even some time "on the bum" — riding freight cars to California. His father was a physician, an agnostic, at least by True Believer standards; his mother was currently a True Believer.

*Nice manners, I thought. And awfully good looking. But I wish to heaven the guy wouldn't argue so much!*

I tried to savor each day at college completely, because as the year wore on, there was a feeling of impermanence, of change, on the Kelsey campus. The unfamiliar word "depression" kept appearing oftener and oftener in newspaper headlines. Students were dropping out of classes to go to work. We heard rumors that the teachers weren't being paid, that the school was in deep financial difficulties. The administration building, the only modern

structure at Kelsey, had been erected in 1929, just before the crash, and now there was no money to pay for it. Dr. Velie spent most of his time downtown in conference with the bankers and mortgage company officials, and scholastic affairs got less and less attention, since everyone felt that the school might close its doors any time. Only in Professor George's big corner room did I feel a sense of future in the school.

Kelsey was in such shaky financial straits that there was even talk of omitting the regular spring revival. But one morning when I went to chapel I saw a familiar, striking figure seated on the platform with the faculty. Brother Joel Dinstman, the evangelist, was a good friend of Father's. He would have attracted attention anywhere, with his coal-black wavy hair, intense dark eyes and restless, panther vitality. Instead of a conventional necktie he always wore a small black string bow, and this, plus his black suit and broad-brimmed black hat, gave him a stagy, theatrical look entirely at variance with his warm, simple, sincere personality.

The revival Brother Dinstman held was to become a sort of pinnacle other evangelists could never surpass. From the very first service, with the big man preaching in his hoarse, impassioned, intense manner, a wave of intense emotionalism swept the school. Prayer meetings broke out in dormitory rooms; classes were interrupted by spontaneous testimonies from converts. Listening to Brother Dinstman, I could see and hear Father, his fore-

head wrinkled with earnestness, his voice deep with concern as he called sinners forward for repentance.

Sitting in the chapel service I looked around me. *Sinners?* Two weeks ago, at regular morning chapel, most of these same students had been Christians. What was happening to them to make them lose their assurance? And then I translated my own feelings into conscious thought. My sense of insecurity — the day-to-day feeling on the campus, the financial stresses, the nostalgia for home — they'd all been intensified, I knew, by the effulgent, dramatic warmth of the revival. Abruptly I felt as if my emotions were wrung, depleted, exhausted.

I got up and went quietly out the side door. For once, leaving a revival service, I didn't have the apprehensive memory of the familiar evangelistic stories: the girl who left a service and was struck down by pneumonia, the man who walked out of church to be hit by lightning. *God isn't like that*, I thought, walking down the dirt path away from the chapel. And for once, I was *sure* of something! God gave me my mind, too, and perhaps He expected me to follow its guidance as well as that of my emotions, swayed and manipulated as they were by every familiar phrase, song and prayer from my childhood.

Behind me now I could hear the sound of the first invitation hymn:

Are you ready? Are you ready?  
Are you ready for the judgment day?



The world I'd grown up in was warm, friendly and safe now. Over the years of my growing up it had become warmer, more sheltering than it had been at first. Outside of it there were strange paths to tread, wrenching, solitary decisions to make. Outside the winds blew cold and the landscape was unfamiliar and wide. *I'll go home and stay*, I thought in a sudden flurry of retreat. And *I won't come back next year*.

But at the corner, coming toward the school, I met Clovis. As of one impulse, we sat down side by side on a near-by bus bench. Although at school I'd found it easy to talk to him, now I sat silent, watching his hands from under my lashes, wondering if his eyes were really as blue as I remembered, and afraid to look.

"Are you coming back to school next year?" he asked me, and I looked up to meet his direct, blue gaze. I didn't answer for a minute.

We only sat there, looking at each other. I smiled just a little and he smiled back in the same tentative, discovering way.

The world lay out on either side, rich with new people to know, new books to read, new words to hear, new ideas to explore. And God was everywhere, infinite and limitless. There were no boundaries. No gates. No barriers. If I could leave my walls behind . . .

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I am."

And my hand turned, palm upward under his, between us on the bench.

## Chapter Twenty-One

*“ . . . and ever safe abide ”*

THE TRUE BELIEVER CHURCH IS CHANGING, FOR a church grows up.

Sometimes when it's young, like other youngsters, it's likely to be free and exuberant — and noisy. With age and size and responsibility, it grows quiet, staid and respectable.

The True Believer Church is getting middle-aged now. Its large, growing membership, its accredited colleges and ministerial seminary, its new, big church buildings, have given it the burdens of maturity.

The True Believer churches still wear their canvas signs, but now the sagging, brightly-lettered sashes often read YOUTH CONFERENCE or DAILY VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL instead of REVIVAL MEETING TONITE — 7:30 — EVERYBODY WELCOME.

The brown revival tent in the weedy vacant lot has been turned over, in good part, to smaller, newer denominations, and even the True Believer street meetings

in which I blushed, stammered and suffered when I was fourteen are just about gone.

Jonnie, my brother, is a True Believer minister now. He speaks at the high school commencements in his town and plays on the city league softball team. His church members call him by his first name, and when he walks along the sidewalk downtown the banker and the car salesman and the druggist yell, "Hi, Rev!"

And Father — Father is proud of him!

Father has the biggest church in his town now. The auditorium, with its velvet draperies and quiet colors and oak pews, is a far cry from the rented store buildings, the little bare chapels, the canvas tabernacles where he started preaching. For Father and his denomination have grown to respectable middle age together.

But sometimes now I walk along a street and see a thin, long-legged, shamed-eyed girl proffering a religious magazine to the passers-by or see her standing, as I did, with a half dozen men and women at the curb edge singing "Throw Out the Lifeline" to the Saturday night shoppers who hurry by with impatient or amused faces.

And then I remember how it was — growing up a True Believer.

The days go and the weeks go and the years.

You glance up, off guard, and see yourself in a mirror and there is a sudden plunging feeling inside you and a sharp catch in your throat and you say, "Is this I?"

No, it can't be.

I am a shrill-voiced, tearful girl arguing desperately with her father.

I am a frightened, uncertain girl in a skimpy polo coat, riding a bus back to college, back to her sophomore year.

I am a surer, happier girl in a long blue chiffon dress with her arms full of pink roses, marrying a tall, blue-eyed young high school teacher.

The mirror said No. The mirror on the sun visor of Father's car reflected concisely and coldly, *Married Daughter*, 32, *Home for Visit*.

But I knew that I was a montage of all those girls, certain and uncertain, happy and unhappy, as I sat quietly in the car beside Father, waiting again for a bus. While Clovis was overseas during the war, I was at home visiting, working in the local newspaper office, and now on the spur of the moment I'd decided to take a bus from the Idaho town where Father was pastor to Seattle, to spend the week end with my sister Elizabeth.

It was a cold, dreary morning and because we were a little early, we sat in the car while we waited. I hadn't been alone with Father since I'd been home, I realized. There were always so many people around the big parsonage: My brother James Webster, a college freshman but trying desperately to get into the Air Force; Eunice home, too, while her ensign husband was on Guam; Mother, gray but still calm, pretty and sweet; all the visitors and telephone calls and business of a big, busy

church. I hadn't minded exactly; I was always uneasy, on the defensive, talking to Father.

Now that we were alone the silence hung heavy and uncomfortable between us. I made a show of winding my watch and Father wiped the mist from inside the windshield, taking a good deal of time about it. I looked at him out of the corner of my eye, realizing that my mental picture of him had changed a good deal since I arrived. Father had always seemed the same age ever since I could remember, always straight and thin and full of quick, nervous energy that seemed to crackle from his wiry dark hair and to gleam in his narrow gray eyes. I knew now that he wouldn't stay the same forever, that he had changed, was changing, each day before my eyes. His hair seemed grayer than when I arrived, and his shoulders, under his tweed topcoat, had a slight sag to them, just as did the lines in his thin, decisive, sharp-jawed face.

All at once, watching him, I knew that he had something he wanted to say to me, something important, but that he was having difficulty in beginning. I clenched up inside, as always, remembering the old arguments, my baffled tears.

"Oh, Lord, no. Not now, please, not now!" I thought, wishing the bus would come. I was sure Father would begin by asking me some stern, probing question about the state of my soul. But for once it wasn't my spiritual status in which he was interested.

For a minute I couldn't take in, couldn't comprehend, what he was saying in a strained, difficult, halting voice. I couldn't have been more startled if God Himself had spoken, had leaned over a cloud and told me confidentially that He had decided to amend the Ten Commandments.

"I do feel that — perhaps —" Father was saying, "we — I was too hard on you when you were growing up, Hannah. I thought I was doing the right thing." He sighed a little. "I so wanted you children to be examples in the Church, but perhaps I sacrificed you to the Work. Perhaps I've been selfish, put the Church first."

He wasn't looking at me; he was looking straight ahead through the misty windshield at the placard-crowded window of Harley's Drug Store in front of us. "And," he said with effort, "I think now that I was wrong in opposing your marriage. I see now that you and Clovis are right for each other, that you're happy together. I — I want you to know that."

I didn't say anything. I couldn't say anything; I was crying too hard. When the bus came, I walked wet-eyed and wet-cheeked down the aisle and took a seat, still crying. The other passengers, I hoped dimly, would take my torrent of tears for parting sorrow. No one on the bus, after all, knew that I'd be back in town, working on the newspaper again, Monday morning. I cried till the next town and beyond. Then all at once, I stopped crying — for I knew why I cried.

The tears were for parting sorrow. And parting joy. Or for parting. For I was, at long last, free.

Never before had I been able to achieve the complete release I sought. Always Father had stood, strong, solitary and gigantic, on my skyline, but often the lengthened shadow that he cast had lain like a dark, aching wound across my consciousness. Now, though I knew that his life would still tower, shining and unforgettable, above me, the shadow was gone. For Father, all along, had been growing up, too. Even with his spiritual strength, he had had his human frailties. He, too, had his moments of secret, torturing self-doubt. But in avowing his weakness, Father had never seemed stronger.

And he had given me, at last, the gift of freedom.

No longer, when I went reluctantly but stubbornly in the way that was right for me would I need to feel that I was flying in the face of God.

For God, like Father, at last wore a loving face.











